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THE WORKS OF LOUIS DE BLOIS
COMMONLY CALLED LUDOVICUS BLOSIUS

VI—THE PARADISE OF
THE FAITHFUL SOUL—PART I

THE PARADISE OF THE FAITHFUL SOUL

(PARADISUS ANIMAE FIDELIS)

PART I.—A RULE OF THE SPIRITUAL LIFE
(CANON VITAE SPIRITUALIS)

By LUDOVICUS BLOSIUS

In an Anonymous Translation

Revised and Edited by
BERNARD DELANY, of the Order of Preachers
With an Introduction by the same

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INTRODUCTION

THIS little book, *A Rule of the Spiritual Life*, is a translation of the treatise entitled *Canon Vitae Spiritualis*, which forms the first part of *The Paradise of the Faithful Soul* (*Paradisus Animae Fidelis*). From the dedication we gather that it was already written in 1539, when Blosius was thirty-three years of age, and it is usually reckoned the first in order of time of his spiritual writings, although *A Mirror for Monks* preceded it in date of publication (1538).

The English edition of the work here presented is a revised version of a translation which first appeared in 1871,* edited by Father John Edward Bowden of the Oratory of St Philip Neri. Another English translation of the *Canon Vitae Spiritualis* appeared at about the same date under the general title, *The Manual of the Spiritual Life*,† and the sub-titles, *From the French of Blosius*.

* *Spiritual Works of Louis of Blois* (R. Washbourne, London).

† John Hodges, 47, Bedford Street, Strand, London.

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Part I, The Rule of the Spiritual Life. The translator remains nameless, but when we find that a very considerable part of Chapter XVIII, dealing with the worship of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints, is suppressed, we are more than suspicious that the translation did not come from Catholic hands, although the book was issued by a Catholic Publisher.

* * * * *

The most attractive characteristics of the works of Blosius are his never-failing kindliness, his cheerful optimism, and serene joyousness, which leave the reader convinced that all is right with this world because all is right with the next. His special aim, it would seem, is to prescribe for a spiritual malady which is only too prevalent among persons striving to lead a good Christian life. This malady manifests itself in the form of depression, discontent, weariness, sadness, disappointment, and all the other black humours that are implied in its name, "acedy" (*acedia*), or sloth. St Thomas* defines it as "weariness in well-doing and sadness about spiritual things." "It is an oppressive sorrow which so weighs upon man's mind that he wants to do nothing," and St Thomas adds quaintly, "thus acid

* IIa IIae, xxxv 1.

things are always cold." Acedy, or sloth, seems to be the besetting vice of persons striving after holiness. People who have, to a greater or less degree, overcome the world and the flesh, have still to contend with the devil, who uses his subtlest wiles to make their spiritual labours toilsome and troublesome, and to create and foster within them moods of despondency and disgust. The soul afflicted with this weariness of the spirit is compared in Holy Scripture to a moth-eaten garment or worm-eaten wood; *As a moth doth by a garment, and a worm by the wood; so the sadness of a man consumeth the heart.**

The most effective remedies against this perilous canker within the soul will be found in the sane wisdom of this book. Blosius ever heartens and braces the soul to renewed trust in God. He reminds us that our sins, however numerous and however great, will never exceed the mercies of the Lord. "God," he says, "holds his hand between thee and the fire of tribulation, even as a tender mother is wont to do when she undresses her baby son before the fire." Further, he comforts us with the assurance that "we may purchase heaven at less cost than hell." Those who feel their wills

* Prov. xxv 20.

paralysed or who shrink with dread, in a veritable Gethsemani of the spirit, from the suffering and drudgery of constantly going on, will find in Blosius a real angel from heaven comforting them.

BERNARD DELANY, O.P.

BLACKFRIARS,
OXFORD.

AUTHOR'S DEDICATION

TO THE MOST REVEREND FATHER AND LORD IN CHRIST

FRANCIS QUIÑONES,

CARDINAL,

OF THE TITLE OF THE HOLY CROSS,

LUDOVICUS BLOSIUS,

HUMBLE ABBOT OF LIESSIES,

GREETING.

BEHOLD, most excellent Prelate, I have lately written for my own use, in common, unadorned style, a Rule of the Spiritual Life. I have compiled it from the writings of the Fathers, so that I might have always at hand in brief and compact form a standard upon which to fashion my own life. Whatever there is in this little work I offer and dedicate to you; and with so slender a gift I salute your holiness.

I have no fear that its unpolished style will offend you, since I know your intense zeal and love for Holy Writ which is commended, not for outward embellishments of speech, but for the inward fruit of truth that it contains. I have a confident hope of your

agreeing that, if maybe I have written without elegance, at least I may not have written without profit. Indeed, I must admit that I am not the sort of person who could speak eloquently even if I would, nor would I if I could. Simplicity is piety's dearest friend, and it often happens—I know not how—that exquisitely devised phrases do not so much penetrate the heart as render it soft and effeminate. The whole book is nothing more than a jumble of pious teachings. I have divided it into chapters to give the reader rest and breathing-space.

May the Lord Jesus Christ deign to keep your Paternity in happiness.

Given at Liessies on the first of May, 1539.

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1. The sinner should never despair of forgiveness.
2. He should strive to rise speedily from his sins by true contrition.
3. God's mercy is greater than our misery.
4. Christ himself pleads for the sorrowing sinner.

1. FEAR and love God.* *With all watchfulness keep thy heart :*† in all places take heed that thou keep it pure; be always solicitous lest thou offend God by sin. But yet if thou hast sinned, distrust not his mercy. However many and enormous may have been thy sins, thou shouldst never despair of pardon. Hast thou fallen? Rise up, turn to the Physician of thy soul, and the bowels of his pity will be open to thee. Hast thou fallen again? Rise up again, groan and cry out; and the mercy of thy Redeemer will receive thee. Hast thou fallen three, four times, yea oftener? Rise

* *Cf.* Lev. xxv 17, 36; 1 Pet. ii 17.
† Prov. iv 23.

up once more, weep, sigh, humble thyself; and thy God will not desert thee.

2. He never has despised and he never will despise a contrite heart;* he never has rejected and never will reject those who fly to him in true repentance. If thou cease not to arise, he will not cease to receive thee. Wherefore, if thou shalt have fallen a hundred, yea, even a thousand times within the space of one short hour, rise up as many times as thou hast fallen, with the holy hope of pardon; and arising give thanks to thy Lord, who has not permitted thee to fall more grievously, or to lie longer in perdition. And even if, after receiving innumerable gifts of grace, thou hast denied thy God (though far be it from thee), and hast trodden underfoot his Sacraments; humbly acknowledge thy guilt, detest thy wickedness, heartily determine to sin no more, firmly resolve to lead a better life, and feel secure of pardon.

3. For thy malice or thy weakness cannot be so great as to surpass the mercy of God, which knows neither measure nor limit. God is almighty; he pardons in one moment innumerable myriads of sins as easily as one single sin. He is most kind; he is most willing to spare thee, to be propitious to thee; if thou wilt humble thyself, if thou wilt keep

* *Cf.* Ps. l 19.

from sin, and amend thy life. Therefore let not the memory of past sins disturb thee; but let these words of the Apostle console thee: *And such some of you were; but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the spirit of our God.**

Thou canst not put too much confidence in his goodness, if only thou dost not abuse it by sinning more easily.

4. Oh! if thou knewest how ready is Christ our Lord to appease God the Father by his innocence, and to reconcile to him his elect, who have sinned through human frailty, and resolve for the future to avoid sin! He is our advocate and pleads for us; that repenting of evil, we may always obtain a most ready pardon. For thus saith the chosen disciple, St John: *If any man sin, we have an advocate, Jesus Christ the Just; and he is the propitiation for our sins.*†

Therefore, let not thy crimes make thee faint-hearted, but humble: since thou dost indeed hate evil, and desirest to please God.

* 1 Cor. vi 11. † 1 John ii 1, 2.

CHAPTER II

OF THE CONSIDERATION OF THE GOODNESS AND JUSTICE OF GOD

1. The truly penitent should think of God's mercy: the hardened sinner of his justice.
2. God's incomprehensible love for the truly repentant.
3. Penance wins pardon even for the greatest sinners.
4. The devil's trick to deceive sinners.
5. The danger of putting off repentance.

1. ACCORDING to the counsel of Scripture, think of the Lord in goodness*; thou must not regard him as cruel or inexorable; but believe him to be kind, merciful, sweet, and bountiful towards those who are of good will and who repent with all their hearts. For he knows what he hath fashioned, he contemplates his own image, he considers our frailty, our wanderings, our blindness. When he is said to be terrible, or to rebuke the wicked in his wrath, it is said not as if he were terrible in himself, but only towards those who, having cast away holy shame, persist in the defilements of their sins: he repels and punishes

* *Cf.* Wisd. i 1.

their sins, as most foreign to his sweetness and purity, remaining all the while sweet and tranquil in himself. Do thou, therefore, when thou dost meditate on him, exclude every thought of terror or bitterness; and be persuaded that he looks with eyes of extreme mercy and exceeding loving-kindness upon all that he has created; that he also watches over thee and ever keeps thee, as if thou wert the only living being on the earth.

Let those fear the justice and the anger of God, who turn not to God, who heap sin upon sin, and say, What have I done? who will not understand that they might do well,* for these, indeed, justly fall under his anger, while they remain as they are. But the sinners who, repenting within themselves, arise, and, turning with their whole hearts to the Father of mercies, say, *Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee,*† have mercy on me: let these sinners, I say, trust in the Lord; for he will doubtless receive them, and receiving he will justify them, and justifying he will at length admit them into his kingdom.

2. It is beyond comprehension with what charity, with what bowels of paternal love, he everywhere desires and secures our salvation. No mother ever delighted in the son of her womb so tenderly as he delights in us.

* *Cf.* Ps. xxxv 4. † Luke xv 18.

A huge fire does not so quickly consume a bundle of tow cast into it as God, through his ineffable pity and mercy, pardons our sins, if we truly repent of our ill-spent life and, humbly turning to him, seek forgiveness, resolving with our whole will to lead henceforth a better life. Nor doth he desire the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.* *If we confess our sins,* saith the Scripture, *He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all iniquity.*† The more numerous and grievous are the sins which he forgives, and the more unworthy and miserable are we whom he pardons, the more doth his glory shine forth.

3. And who can worthily praise his unspeakable goodness, who can worthily give him thanks for it? For since no one can attain to salvation who has not even so little charity as to repent for the love of God, at least in the last moments of his life, and to turn from his sins; behold, God, the most merciful lover of mankind, often shows himself in the hour of death kind and loving even to desperate sinners (whom he knows to be distinguished by the merits of some virtue), in order that they may grieve from their inmost hearts for having offended so gracious a Creator and Redeemer.

* *Cf.* Ezech. xviii 21, and xxxiii 11. † 1 John i 9.

By this repentance they are rendered capable of being saved, and having passed through such purgation from their sins as the divine justice may require, are admitted to the eternal joy of the heavenly kingdom. For in the deepest and most secret abyss lies hidden that inexhaustible fountain from which so much pity flows out to us, from which so much mercy is poured forth upon us; and whosoever despairs of this mercy denies that God is good and true, and blasphemes the Holy Spirit.

4. It is the devil's way to make use of this wicked trick; to one who intends to sin he promises that God is most forbearing and merciful; but when anyone having sinned wishes to repent, he uses every art to persuade him that he is unforgiving and most severe. But we must not listen to the crafty liar. Wherefore be of good courage, and however much thou mayest have sinned, let nothing cast thee down from holy hope.

5. See, however, that thou dost not deceive thyself, and promising thyself certain forgiveness, dost not persist in thy evil courses and put off thy conversion: for many perish through this delusion. Pardon of sins is promised thee indeed, if even in the last extremity of life thou truly repentest, that is out of love for God rather than from fear of

punishment; but thou art not promised the grace of true repentance. This sort of repentance which is deferred to the end of life is very doubtful, very perilous, and it is not always true. Therefore, in order that at the hour of death thou mayest safely pass hence, do penance, and amend thy life while thou art in health and hast still the power to sin. For if thou ceasest to sin when thou canst sin no longer, thou dost not abandon sin, but sin abandons thee.

CHAPTER III

HOW EASY IT IS FOR THE FAITHFUL SOUL TO BLOT OUT SINS, ESPECIALLY VENIAL SINS

1. In every need run to God with unwavering trust.
2. The various ways of wiping out venial sins.
3. There is less blame in sins of human frailty than in sins of wilful neglect.
4. God sometimes lets us sin to school us in humility and watchfulness.
5. Love blots out sin more easily than anxious self-reproach.

1. If thy soul is grievously sick, if thou labourest under the malady of pride, vain-glory, anger, envy, gluttony, avarice, or any other still more dangerous vice, cast not away on that account the hope of salvation; but approach with confidence to the heavenly Healer, draw near to Jesus, beseech him to stretch forth his hand to thee. He is most merciful, he is most pitiful: he does not reject nor repel the sick, he shuns not their companionship, but compassionates them beyond what words can say. He is ever ready to heal thee, if thou dost lay open thy sickness, if thou from thy heart desirest to be healed, if thou do but humble thyself, and trust in him.

2. Be not, however, downcast on account of the daily sins which thou committest unwillingly. For as we offend in many things at least slightly every day: so we have at hand daily expiations, by which sins of this sort are effaced. There is holy confession, there are groans, there are tears, there is spiritual reading of the word of God, there is almsgiving, there is hospitality, there is that Prayer in which we say to our Lord, *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us,** there are other prayers, and other works of piety, mercy, and charity. Therefore acknowledge thy fault, weep, sigh, renew thy holy purpose; labour peacefully for this end, that thou mayest avoid those same offences; commit the rest to God and cast thyself upon him. For he, in the counsels of his inscrutable wisdom, often suffers the stains of these negligences to cling to us, that we may be ever more humbled; that utterly distrusting ourselves, we may hope in him: and that manfully resisting sin, we may be trained in virtue and at length be gloriously crowned.

3. It is one thing to fall into venial sins through unlooked-for occasions of human frailty; and another to fall through wilful neglect. For he falls from weakness alone

* Matt. vi 12.

who when he is free in his own mind hates sin and avoids the occasions of it; and yet when occasions offer themselves, readily offends by an unbridled tongue, or too great liberty of the senses, or any similar transgression; but who, as soon as he comes to himself, grieves and turns away from the least stain of sin, quickly seeking for pardon. On the other hand, he who sins from wilful neglect, when in the absence of occasions he might be free, strange to say hankers after the occasions and gives way to them, not indeed for the sake of the sin, but for the sake of the pleasure. He too may perhaps fall from frailty, but not from frailty alone; however, if immediately after having yielded, he truly repents with renewed resolution, he also may speedily obtain pardon of his sin.

4. Many are even suffered by God to fall grievously, in order that, taught by their own misfortune, they may become better. Yet no one rises again after a fall better than he would have been if he had not sinned, and if without falling he had done all the good that he has done since his fall.

5. Know, however, that thou wilt be more effectually cleansed from these lighter faults if thou acknowledge thy sin, turning humbly and lovingly to God, than if thou shouldst brood over them within thyself, and occupy

thyself long and timidly with the consideration of them. But be they grievous or be they slight, abide unshaken in thy holy trust in God, casting them into the abyss of his mercies, that there they may be altogether consumed and done away. *There is now, therefore, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh,** but rather *being justified by his blood, shall they be saved from wrath through him.*†

* Rom. viii 1. † Rom. v 9.

CHAPTER IV

TRUE CONTRITION AND TRUE SATISFACTION

1. True contrition means interior sorrow which need not be expressed outwardly by tears.
2. Repentance is not the result of our own efforts but of Christ's merits.
3. Christ's merits are the source of our hope.
4. Humble confidence with good works the most excellent satisfaction for sin.

1. BE not disturbed because, perchance, thou canst not offer to God sensible contrition of heart for thy sins. For if there be sorrow in thy intellect and will, if it truly displease thee that thou hast offended thy most merciful God, if thou grievest that thou art not more grieved, if thou resolvest to lead a better life for the future; this sort of contrition is most pleasing to God, though the heart may remain without sensible sorrow. For it is possible for the mind in a moment so to detest sin, that having obtained perfect forgiveness it is rendered worthy of heaven. If outward tears be absent, let not inward tears be wanting: without the first thou canst lament thy sins and be pleasing to God: without the latter thou canst do neither. Thou art not wanting in inward tears when

the offence against God truly displeases thee; when in thy mind thou turnest utterly away from sin, when with great earnestness thou seekest God and sighest after him.

2. Whatever good work thy hand is able to do, do it with thy might.* Yet not with the idea that thou art able of thyself to make satisfaction to God for thy sins; but do them all that thou mayest please him whom thou hast offended. Pray to the Lord Jesus that he would deign to blot out thine iniquities by his most innocent passion, and to satisfy for them before his Father. Place thy hopes of salvation in the adoption of sons,† which we have received through his Incarnation and death, and the shedding of his precious Blood.

3. We certainly do not deny nor reject the merit of good works, as heretics now do; but we say that all our hope must rest chiefly on the merits of Jesus Christ. When we are weak and downcast, these words of the blessed Apostle St Paul ought to reanimate us: *A faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners.*‡ *He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and might cleanse to himself a people, acceptable, a pursuer of good works.*§

* *Cf.* Eccles. ix 10.
† *Cf.* Rom. viii 15; Gal. iv 3; Ephes. i 5.
‡ 1 Tim. i 15. § Tit. ii 14.

According to his mercy he hath saved us, *that being justified by his grace, we may be heirs, according to hope of life everlasting.** It is, indeed, a faithful saying. He, being God, willed to be made man for us: for us he was born, he suffered and died; for us he rose again, for us he ascended into heaven. In him we have already risen again; in him this miserable flesh has already been raised up and freed from corruption; in him we already ascend into heaven and obtain the inheritance of the kingdom. For where the Head hath gone before, there shall the body also follow. This is truly a saying worthy of all acceptation, sweetly penetrating the very marrow of the interior man.

4. Our humility, by which we acknowledge our own unworthiness, and by which we judge our good actions to be vile and imperfect, and our confidence in God, by which we hope in him, extolling the merits of his life and passion, outweigh all the satisfactions we can make. It is necessary, however, that we should always do whatever we can easily accomplish; and that we should ascribe the good that we do, not to ourselves, but to him without whom we can do nothing.† The Lord bestoweth the good gift; and what he hath given he is pleased to crown.

* Tit. iii 7. † *Cf.* John xv 5.

CHAPTER V

REMEDIES FOR FAINT-HEARTEDNESS IN THE CONVERTED SINNER

1. Indeliberate acts and impulses are not sins.
2. How to overcome temptations against faith and chastity.
3. How to deal with vainglory and disordered curiosity.
4. How to deal with evil dreams.

1. If the devil persecutes thee, if he afflicts thy spirit with his foul temptations, if thou art now forced against thy will to suffer what thou didst once willingly admit, let it not disturb thee. Whatsoever thou bearest against thy will, will not ruin thee, nor make thee offend God. For sin must be voluntary; what is not voluntary, is not sin. Resist, struggle, keep thy will free from consent, and then let the devil and the flesh rage. Although there may sometimes arise in the lower animal powers of thy soul either a wicked delight in prosperity, or an inordinate sadness in adversity; although thou mayest feel in thyself an impulse of vainglory, anger, or any other vice; although thou mayest

find thyself indisposed to obey; this interferes not at all with thy spiritual progress, nor mars the uprightness of thy life, provided that thou remainest quiet and undisturbed in the higher powers of thy mind, and clingest to God, without ever consenting to the absurd motions of the affections and passions.

2. Those things which belong to faith, do thou believe to be more certain than those which are discerned by the eyes. But, if thou shouldst begin against thy will to waver or to doubt, fly to God, and humbly exclaim, "I believe, O Lord, help my unbelief."

Flout and scorn the devil, the suggester of impious or unclean thoughts. Thrust at him the wholesome sign of our Lord's cross; turn away thy thoughts from his pestilent suggestions, and occupy thyself with some pious meditation. Esteem him who thus barks at thee unworthy to be answered. But, if thou desirest to speak, say this or something similar: "Be silent, O impudent tongue; begone, wicked one, with thy blasphemies and uncleanness. I hear thee not; thou art nothing to me, O impious wretch." And say to God, "O Lord, help me; a thousand times would I rather undergo death than consent to iniquity; I would rather cease to live, than

live having offended thee and having lost thy grace."

3. If the cunning serpent entice thee to vainglory, recall to mind the multitude and the enormity of thy sins. If he persuades thee to fail in confidence, bring to mind the abyss of the mercies of God, and his singular love and pity for thee. If he whispers some foolish thoughts on predestination or the other counsels and judgements of the Holy Trinity into which we ought not to enquire: do thou, despising the barking of that unclean dog, turn to God, and commit all things to his merciful providence; being fully persuaded that he is most desirous of thy salvation. They fall into a dangerous snare who dare rashly to scrutinise the judgements of God. Certain it is that everything is just which the Lord does, which he ordains, which he permits: do thou believe this and rest upon it, seeking nothing further.

4. If thou shouldst suffer in thy sleep any defilement, be not cast down; for it will not be imputed to thee, provided that on awaking and recovering consciousness, thou dost detest whatever is impure. It will not, I say, be imputed to thee, although thou mayest seem to have given occasion for what thou now sufferest by the impurity of thy former life. For thou hast already laid down the

burden of thy past sins, by honest, healthy confession; thou hast already repented of thy former conversation, and thou strivest to amend it. Therefore let nothing of this kind cast thee down from the steadfastness of holy trust.

CHAPTER VI

THE SKILL AND DILIGENCE WITH WHICH WE ARE TO RESIST TEMPTATIONS

1. The devil attacks with a thousand wiles.
2. The beginner should resist his first onslaughts.
3. If overcome by his first attacks do not yield a second time.
4. Blame not God when overcome.
5. Delay not to rise swiftly from sin.

1. THAT crafty deceiver will not rest, but will try by every means to overcome and ruin thee. He will usually be most active in the beginning, or after the beginning of a better life; namely, while vicious passions and affections are still raging within thee, he will stir up the war, sometimes from within, sometimes from without; he will entrap thee now by prosperity, now by adversity; sometimes he will lay snares for thee by foolish joy, sometimes by untimely sadness; at one time he will aim at destroying thee through too great security, at another through too great depression. He will sometimes retire for awhile, and let thee alone, that he may soon after more grievously wound thee unawares. Sometimes he will lay his snares

secretly, and, as it were, creep in by degrees under the garb of religion; sometimes he will try to inflict a wound by breaking in openly and unexpectedly. Sometimes, when repulsed, he will come again and again to the attack, and assiduously persevere in it; that so he may conquer by very boldness one whom he could not overthrow either by force or by stratagem. Thou wilt be sometimes so perplexed, and such darkness will overshadow thy mind, that thou wilt not know what to do, nor what to think; therefore thou wilt be carried to and fro, and miserably agitated. Sometimes thy spirit, thy heart, and thy senses will be so constrained, depressed, and distracted, that thou wilt not wish to open thy mouth to praise God, nor wilt thou be able to attend when thou prayest. Sometimes thou wilt be so worn out and buffeted on all sides by misfortunes, that, like one deprived of the help of God, and surrounded by the shadow and horror of death, thou wilt say with the Apostle St Paul, *We were pressed out of measure above our strength, so that we were weary even of life.**

Lastly, sometimes not one only, but many of these temptations, or even all at once may assail thee, if God permit it; for, unless he permit, thou wilt not be tempted; and,

* 2 Cor. i 8.

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if he should permit, it will be for thy great advantage.

2. But do thou guard against these temptations; and, like one placed on a watch-tower, look out diligently, to see where the enemy may either rush or creep in. It is often a very frivolous thing, or even a very holy thing, which, if we are not on the watch, excites within us a great tumult, and a dangerous temptation. Therefore we must be suspicious even of those things which are not evil in themselves. Prudent watchfulness is always necessary, but chiefly in the beginning of temptations. For the enemy usually keeps this order in his attacks; he first instils into our minds the simple thought of the thing coveted; then, if he sees that what he has suggested pleases us, he renders the thought vehement and complicated, binding as it were the mind with chains, and hemming it in on every side. If, while we are still free, we resist not, we shall with greater difficulty resist after he has thus inwardly bound us.

3. If, however, we have been negligent in the beginning, we must not, therefore, yield to the adversary, but by all means resist and struggle, and courageously shake off our fetters. Wherefore, as far as is in thy power, resist the beginnings of temptation; trusting not in thine own endeavours, nor in thine own

efforts, but in the mercy of God: *Unless the Lord keep the city, he watcheth in vain that keepeth it.**

Unless he upholds thee always, thou wilt not stand; if he withdraw his hand, straightway thou wilt fall. But, while he is with thee by his grace, see that thou art not wanting to thyself through negligence. Join thy free will to his grace, and labour in union with it.

4. If thou shouldst happen to fall, overcome by temptation, throw not the blame on God, nor on the devil, nor on fate; for pious Christians utterly deny and execrate those ideas of fate and fatal necessity which have been invented by the heathen or by impious Christians. As I have said, if, overcome by temptation, thou hast fallen and sinned, accuse not God, who is not the author of iniquity; but accuse thyself, who didst consent to the devil: (for no one can force thee to consent to him against thy will:) accuse thyself, I say, and quickly rise again.

5. For as recent wounds are easily healed by fomentations and plasters applied at once, but are less easily cured if the remedies are long delayed; so thou wilt recover thy former grace without great labour if thou dost return and do penance immediately after having allowed thyself to sin; but if thou remainest

* Ps. cxxvi 1.

is, perhaps, in human nature to be sometimes angry; but it is devilish to continue in anger and hatred. There is no better means both to restrain and overcome the impulse of anger than by recalling to mind the patience and meekness of Christ the Lord thy God. In the same way thou canst apply no more efficacious remedy to the ulcers of pride, than to place before the eyes of thy mind the humility of thy Saviour. For not without cause he said, *Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart.** Let the disciple be ashamed of being lifted up with pride and high-mindedness, when he sees that his Master is humble. Let man be ashamed of being fierce and burning with anger, when he sees that God is meek. Let the creature be ashamed of his repugnance and want of submission, when he contemplates the obedience of the Creator.

3. The sum of all Christian philosophy is this: to strive to follow Jesus our leader in true humility. For *unless you be converted, and become as little children, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.*†

The more humble a man is, the nearer he is to God, and the more he excels in evangelical perfection. Blessed are they who deserve to be numbered among those whom

* Matt. xi 29. † Matt. xviii 3.

the world esteemeth fools, but whom God holdeth for wise.

4. Listen willingly to every one: suffer any one to teach and admonish thee, though he may be thy junior and inferior. Despise none: but put all men above thee, and submit thyself in thy heart to all. For though some may now be wicked, they may yet by the mercy of God become in a moment good and even holy. And it sometimes happens that those who seem imperfect possess some hidden virtues which render them most pleasing to God. Be fully persuaded that there is no sinner, however impious and however wicked, who would not lead a much more holy life than thou dost, if he had received as much grace from God as thou hast. In this way thou wilt think of thyself and wilt easily prefer others to thyself. O that thou mightest achieve such lowliness of mind that thou wouldst submit thyself not only to any man, but to any creature; judging thyself unworthy to see the light and to walk the earth, but only deserving the revenge of all created things for the injuries done to their Creator!

CHAPTER VIII

THE STRIFE OF THE TRULY HUMBLE AGAINST VAINGLORY AND SELF-LOVE

1. The root of humility is to seek only to please God.
2. Four weapons against vainglory.
3. The humble man welcomes rebuffs.
4. A man should wish to seem unto men as he appears in God's sight.

1. DESPISE the favours and the praise of men. Desire not greatly to please nor fear to displease any one: study, however, to live so as to please all good men who truly love God. If God has denied thee beauty of form, acuteness of intellect, or the grace of eloquence, be not ashamed on that account. Nor be ashamed of such meanness of exterior as God and thy condition require; but be greatly ashamed of sin only. Let those things only, I say, distress thee, which are contrary to the honour of God and the salvation of souls; although the true servant of God ought not to neglect a reasonable propriety of manners.

2. When thou art about to do any work of importance, if the desire of human favour assails thy heart, do not continue the work thus; but change thy intention, and desire to

serve and to please God by what thou art doing; and so if the beginning or even the middle of the work has been corrupt, the end will be whole and undefiled. However praiseworthy may have been thy performance of the work, however much thy soul may be tempted by the solicitations of vainglory, do thou oppose by thy reason the enticements of this evil passion, and, as far as lies in thee, keep thy mind free and tranquil. Imagine thyself to have put on the person of another, and that it was done not by thee but by some one else. Ascribe to God all that is good and worthy of praise.

3. Learn to listen with a patient and willing mind to those who point out to thee thy faults: esteeming their judgement to be more correct when they reprove thee, than thy own when thou excusest thyself. O that thou wert no more moved by just praises or unjust reproofs than if they were not spoken of thyself! thou wouldst ascribe the first to God, and impute the last to thyself, committing them to God. O that thou wouldst rather suffer contumely than receive praise! for it is safer and more useful to thee; unless thou wishest not that thou thyself be praised, but that God be praised in thee.

4. No doubt he who is truly humble wishes rather to be thought vile and abject, than

humble and holy. For since he acknowledges himself before God to be a useless, unworthy, and ungrateful sinner, he desires not to seem otherwise before men. When thou art justly reproached, humble thyself; be ready to correct whatever faults are in thee; and commending the rest to the divine care, remain at peace.

If thou hast rested thy peace of mind on the words of men, and not on the testimony of thy conscience and on thy God, thou wilt easily lose it, and be troubled. Let men have what opinion they will of thee; let it be enough for thee that thou art pleasing to him who is *the searcher of hearts and reins.** Nevertheless, after the example of the Apostle St Paul, provide *good things not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of all men.*†

* *Cf.* Ps. vii 10; Wisd. i 6; Rom. viii 27.
† Rom. xii 17.

CHAPTER IX

ADVERSITY IS TO BE ACCEPTED AS SENT TO US BY THE FAVOUR OF GOD. OUR DUTY IN ADVERSITY

1. Adversity should be borne without murmuring.
2. Reverses are love-gifts from God.
3. In adversity, relief should be sought only from God.
4. The evil of seeking help from fortune-tellers and soothsayers.
5. Think not of the man who injures you, but only of God who permits the injury.
6. Whatever God permits, he permits for our good.
7. Out of tribulation God will bring a greater good.

1. As soon as ever thou feelest that any tribulation or adversity is coming upon thee, turn thy mind to the Lord, and commit thyself utterly to him, without murmuring or seeking a reason for the injury. If thou wilt lament, instead of laying thy complaints before men, lay them humbly before the Lord, treating with him of whatever grieves thee, as with a most pitiful Father and most present helper. For his sake bear all things with equanimity. Though the devils lie in wait, and spread the snares of temptations; though thou findest the path of virtue and

justice difficult; though one slanders and another oppresses thee; though the cold pinches and the heat burns thee; though thy stomach is weak and thy head aches; though rottenness enters into thy bones, and swarms under thee;* though thy mind is overclouded and covered with darkness, and tormented by uncertainty; though thy weary spirit slumbers and is chilled by interior coldness; do thou ever remember to preserve thy patience.

2. Receive all adverse things lovingly, as most precious gifts sent to thee from God; whether they arise from the heavens, or the elements, or from the devil, or from adversaries, or from a minister of satanic art, or from wild beasts. Think not that anything happens to thee except by the dispensation of divine providence; for, unless the Lord permitted it, thou wouldst suffer no adversity.

When our common enemy inflicted on the blessed Job the loss of his goods and of his children, the holy man said not, the Lord gave, and the devil hath taken away; but what saith he? *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done: blessed be the name of the Lord.*†

3. In the misfortunes which befall thee, look for relief not from fortune-tellers or soothsayers, but from thy Creator and Redeemer.

* *Cf.* Habac. iii 16. † Job i 21.

For those who apply to fortune-tellers, and professors of magic, and seek wicked counsel from them, abandon God, and turn to the devil. If God knows that health of body will be for thy good, he will doubtless grant it to thy prayers; but if he grant it not, thou must believe that the want of it is expedient to thy soul. It is lack of faith, yea rather the greatest madness, that drives Christians to seek such poisonous remedies.

4. And, lest those who have recourse to him should perceive that they are grievously sinning, the crafty serpent cunningly takes care that in his very spells the names of Christ and of saints are often mingled, and that other divine things are made use of. For, if he did not dilute the poison of superstition with this honey of piety, no Christian would so readily drink of it. And what says the Scripture? *Go not aside after wizards, neither ask anything of soothsayers.** And again, *Neither let there be found among you any wizard, any one that consulteth soothsayers, or observeth dreams and omens; neither let there be any wizard or charmer, nor anyone that consulteth pythonic spirits, or fortune-tellers, or that seeketh truth from the dead.*† These things, therefore, do thou abominate, and place all thy hope in thy God.

* Lev. xix 31. † Deut. xviii 10, 11.

5. Be not angry with men who injure thee; but, recognising in them the instruments of the divine dispensations, love them, and give thanks to God. Regard with the eyes of thy heart him who allows thee to be tried by troubles, rather than those who trouble thee. And if, while thou aimest at this, thy infirmity begins to strive against thee, and to suggest hatred of thy persecutors, cease not, but persevere, and pray to the Most High that thou mayest prevail.

6. Even if the Lord should, as it were, cast thee from him, and give thee over to Satan, so that, abandoned within and without, thou art on all sides encompassed with extreme calamities, driven to horrid thoughts, and oppressed with unspeakable sorrows: yet thou must never suspect any failure in the love of thy most pitiful Maker for thee; thou must not on that account withdraw from him, nor evade the present tribulation, nor seek for useless or forbidden remedies, nor turn to any impure consolation: but in simple faith and simple love keeping to him, allow thyself to be chastised and scourged as he wills and as long as he wills. Await in silence the end that he has ordained. Say in thy heart, "The will of God be done, for it cannot be evil." Waver not, I say, at all in thy holy resolution, though he may not

speedily put an end to thy temptations; but, full of good hope and unflinching courage, remain steadfast.

7. Although God may purge, purify, and prove thee, he does not forsake thee. For *the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a contrite heart, and he will save the humble of spirit.** Perhaps thou knowest not now why he thus bruises and chastises thee; but, when thou art come to him, thou wilt recognise that those scourges with which he now tries thee, came only from his love of thee. He permits no misfortune, however trifling, to happen without its being for the exceeding advantage of him who suffers it, if he is patient. The humble endurance of interior dereliction is more pleasing to him than great sweetness of devotion. He will not suffer thee to be tempted beyond thy strength,† provided thou trustest not in thyself, but in him; provided thou art patient, and waitest in holy confidence for his help.

* Ps. xxxiii 19. † *Cf.* 1 Cor. x 13.

CHAPTER X

INDIFFERENCE OF OUR WILL AND CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD IN ADVERSITY

1. Indifference in adversity is the source of peace.
2. Self-seeking causes disturbance and turmoil.
3. Trials should be borne bravely for the love of God.

1. SAY not at any time, such and such tribulations are not expedient for me, I could bear others better and with greater fruit. Thou shalt not, I say, speak any such words in the impatience of thy heart; but, whatever God has laid on thy shoulders for thee to bear, that bear without any murmuring, and believe it to be most useful to thy soul, as indeed it is. Ever labour for this end, that thou mayest subdue and adapt thy will in all things to the divine will and ordering; and, having relinquished thy own, thou wilt become accustomed to follow it as promptly as the shadow follows the substance. If thou art able thus to renounce the inclinations of thy senses and affections for God, it is not to be told what peace and tranquillity thou wilt enjoy; for thou wilt begin in this world, as it were, to inhabit a paradise.

2. The only thing which disturbs thy soul, defiles it, and keeps it from the embrace of the

heavenly Spouse, is the excessive love with which thou seekest thyself, reflectest on thyself, and delightest not in God, but in thyself. From this disordered self-love arise all vicious passions and affections, all confusion and irregularity, and indeed all evil within thee. Inasmuch as this pernicious love is diminished or extinguished in thee, insomuch will thy vices be vanquished; and thou wilt increase in true liberty and true love of God.

3. Therefore do not choose for thyself what evils thou wilt bear, nor again, prescribe what thou wilt not bear; but receive with readiness whatever God has willed to send thee. Be not disturbed, if perchance thou hast brought these misfortunes on thyself by thy sins; but, whether thou hast caused them or not, be calm. Impute them all, indeed, to thine own iniquity, and humble thyself; but yet, as I said, be not unduly affrighted, but preserve thy evenness of mind. Let the Passion of thy God satisfy for thy sins; yet be thou willing to suffer for the love of God. Let the wicked cause of thy evils be hateful to thee; but endure with calmness the evils themselves, offering them in sacrifice to the Most High. Thus they will be to thee, as it were, a baptism most efficacious in washing away thy sins—nay more, they will be, so to speak, a most glorious martyrdom.

CHAPTER XI

PERSEVERANCE IN CONFESSION OF THE FAITH UNDER TRIALS, AFTER THE EXAMPLE OF CHRIST

1. In the face of torture and persecution hold fast to the faith.
2. We should submit to martyrdom rather than deny Christ.
3. Afflictions should be offered to God in union with Christ's passion.

1. If by God's permission thou shouldst fall into such straits as to be forced either to deny the Christian faith or to undergo torments, and even death itself, thou must rather choose to die a thousand times, so to speak, than say a word, or give a sign of impious denial. Flatter not thyself, say not to thyself, I am weak, I have a horror of tortures: what harm will it do if, compelled by fear, I deny Christ by a word or a sign, provided I confess and adore him meanwhile in my heart? Does he not regard the mind rather than words or works? I will outwardly deny him, but I will not deny him inwardly. Thou art utterly mistaken if thou thus persuadest thyself. For it is written: *With the heart we believe unto justice; but with the*

*mouth confession is made unto salvation.** The Christian faith must be confessed not only in secret, but openly, when occasion requires it. He says who is Truth itself: *And he that shall deny me before men, I will also deny him before my Father who is in heaven.*†

If thou hast denied him, thou hast fallen away from God, and art cut off and separated from the communion of the faithful; nor canst thou be again received into their number unless thou dost boldly confess the faith which thou hast wickedly denied; and, having imitated the Apostle St Peter in his denial, dost imitate him also in his penance.‡

2. If thou fearest thy own weakness, avoid persecution, if thou canst. But if, when thou fliest from it, thou art caught and questioned, know that then thou canst no longer evade it. Blessed is that martyr, who humbly and patiently lays down his life, even though with fear and sadness, either for the Christian faith, or for the good of his neighbour, or for the sake of justice and truth. For our Lord, wishing to console his elect, who, from human frailty, are overcome with fear, and tremble at the prospect of death, transferred their weakness to himself, when, at the approach of his Passion, full of fear

* Rom. x 10. † Matt. x 33.
‡ *Cf.* Luke xxii 62.

and sadness, he said: *My soul is sorrowful, even unto death.**

3. Whatever troubles may befall thee, whether they be great or small, accustom thyself to commend and offer them to the eternal praise of the Most High in these or similar words: "O Lord, I commend and offer thee, to the everlasting praise of thy name, this necessity, this misery, this difficulty, this temptation; I offer thee this calamity, in union with the Passion and sorrows of thy only begotten Son, to thy eternal glory." Thou mayest in the same way offer to God any of thy works or exercises. This offering can be made even in a moment without words, by the simple and serene raising up of the mind to God. From this custom thou wilt reap immense fruit. For thus thy works, which of themselves are vile and imperfect, being united to the merits of Christ, will become perfect and most worthy.

* Mark xiv 34.

CHAPTER XII

OF TRUE CONFIDENCE IN GOD, AND VAIN ANXIETY CONCERNING THE FUTURE; AND AGAINST THE FOLLY OF ASTROLOGERS

1. The works of God's providence should not be attributed to fate.
2. The predictions of astrologers sometimes prove true as a punishment for credulity.
3. The devil cannot infallibly foretell the future.
4. The works of magic cannot harm those who trust in God.
5. Leave the future in God's hands.

1. WAIT everywhere on the providence of God: in every event that occurs, lean steadfastly on him, believing that nothing can happen without a cause, nor without a cause proceeding from the reasonable order of things. Attribute what happens neither to fortune nor to the stars. Detest the superstitious and ungodly fables of astrologers, who put the life, the manners, the actions and designs of man under subjection to the stars, and attempt by them to pry into and predict future events, beyond the natural properties of the elements, and of corruptible things. This wild folly savours of idolatry,

and is most baneful to the Christian religion; and, for that reason, it is condemned and forbidden by the utterances of the prophets, and the opinions of the orthodox Fathers. For God thus speaks by Isaias to the Chaldeans, who were familiar with the profession of this science: *Thy wisdom and thy knowledge, this hath deceived thee. Evil shall come upon thee, and thou shalt not know the rising thereof.** And, a little after, he saith to the city that was to be laid waste: *Let now the astrologers stand and save thee, they that gazed at the stars, and counted the months, that from them they might tell the things that shall come to thee. Behold, they are as stubble, fire hath burnt them, they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flames.*† And by Moses it is said: *These nations hearken to soothsayers and diviners; but thou art otherwise instructed by the Lord thy God.*‡ Again, we read in Jeremias: *Be not afraid of the signs of heaven, which the heathens fear.*§ Therefore, the Christian should neither grieve nor rejoice at the vain judgements of astrologers.

2. And, if anyone objects that some of their predictions prove true, we answer, that many do not, and those which do, so happen

* Isa. xlvii 10, 11.
† *Ibid.*, 13, 14.
‡ Deut. xviii 14.
§ Jer. x 2.

by the secret dispensation of God, not by their foolish skill; though they commonly happen to those who believe in the predictions. For, as true Christians for their faith in God always receive what is for their good, so evil often happens by the just judgement of God to those who are not true Christians, in punishment for the faith they put in demons or in the professors of superstition.

3. The devil, however, has not the knowledge of future events; but sometimes foretells the end of things from the beginning, which he sees. When he beholds some one preparing for a journey into Italy, what wonder if, impelled by the malice of his nature, he looks forward, and announces that such a one is coming to Italy? And, when he sees that heavy rain is falling all over Ethiopia, is it a great thing that he should dare to promise that there will be an inundation of the Nile in Egypt? By these means the deceiver induces many to have faith in him.

4. Neither the predictions of astrologers, nor the wonders of magic, nor the arts or charms of Satan can effect anything against those who trust in God, and commit themselves wholly to him. For if they ever afflict the just, the Lord permits it for the good of the just themselves. Despise, therefore, the inventions of those who

foretell I know not what, either from the positions of the stars, or the examination of the countenance and the hands; and turn to the Creator and Governor of the whole world; cling to him, cast thyself upon him.

5. Let nothing that happens disturb thee, whether the season be favourable or inclement; whether the fruits of the earth abound or are scarce; whether God sends peace or the sword, murmur not; but, humbling thyself under his mighty hand, cast down thine eyes and remain tranquil, yet not without feeling. Consider not anxiously whether thou art to have much repose in this exile, whether thou art to pass from hence to purgatory, and to remain there long, or to enter straightway into heaven; but trust thyself entirely to thy Lord, and desire that all things that concern thee as well in the next as in the present world be disposed according to his will; love the justice of God no less than his mercy; and esteem it more grievous to sin, than to pay the penalties of sin.

CHAPTER XIII

OF SCRUPULOUSCONFESSIONS AND FAINT-HEARTEDNESS

1. Anxious and scrupulous repetition of confessions already made is displeasing to God.
2. Frequent confession pleases God.
3. The best remedy for scruples is trust in God.
4. When perplexed by scruples rely not on your own judgement.

1. DRIVE away all inordinate sadness, hurtful depression of mind, superfluous scruples of conscience, untimely and confused repetitions of confessions once made, and other similar disquietudes of mind. It is not pleasing to God that we should be uneasy when we commit trifling offences, as if it were all over with our salvation; and as if he were ready to ensnare and ruin us, because, through inattention, we had forgotten and omitted such and such a circumstance in our confession.

2. He wishes us to give reasonable attention to the discovery of what we have done amiss; and to declare before the Priest all that we remember, openly, simply, and without dissimulation. It is most useful frequently to confess our sins in this manner: lest, if

the confession of them be long delayed, our sins should be forgotten; and, moreover, great benefits of grace result from frequent and humble confession.

3. For those who wish to lead a spiritual life, and especially for new beginners, the devil is accustomed with great persistence to lay the snares of timidity, sadness, mistrust, and sloth; which thou wilt not escape but by pious confidence in God, and spiritual alacrity and promptitude, and by keenly seeking the divine assistance. Great discouragement and excessive fear bring with them many evils; he who is possessed by them is involved in many errors, and fancies all that he does to be sinful; whence it happens that, being in perpetual anguish and disturbance of mind, he torments himself miserably without cause. Such persons are to be treated with great kindness; but if they will promptly and boldly follow the counsels of a prudent guide, rather than their own judgement, they will easily be cured.

4. When thou art wavering, when thou art anxious and doubtful, when arduous and difficult matters arise, fly instantly to God, consult God, and with all thy heart, with steadfast confidence, commit the whole affair to him. Trust not to thine own industry, nor to thine own powers, but to the mercy of

God; acknowledging thyself to be unable to conduct things rightly. And thus all things will end happily. For God will never neglect what thou hast humbly committed to him; but he will arrange, direct, and complete every affair, as he sees best for the good of thyself and others.

CHAPTER XIV

OF PERFECT PEACE AND QUIET OF THE SOUL

1. To seek to love and please God alone is to possess true peace.
2. The happy state of soul of those who possess true peace.
3. This true peace is not permanent in this life.
4. Very few attain true peace in this life.

1. WOULD that God alone occupied thy thoughts! For, so long as thy heart is not detached from all other things, so long as thou cleavest to anything transitory, so long as thou lovest thy own will rather than the will of God, thou canst not be perfectly united to him. Blessed is he who is inwardly detached from all things, who is neither unduly disturbed by losses, nor foolishly elated by success, who meets all inequalities of fortune with an equable mind, who has learnt to forsake self, and, as it were, to go out of himself, who at length, by self-denial, has attained to perfect charity. What peace, thinkest thou, does such a one possess? So great is it that no words suffice to express it.

2. Such persons are sometimes interiorly flooded by so profuse a torrent of divine

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consolation that, being scarcely able to bear it, they are as if forced to withdraw from it, and to cry out, saying: O Lord, withhold the streams of thy grace! Hence it often happens that their very bodies are wonderfully transformed by the grace of the divine visitation. They may, indeed, rightly sing with the Psalmist: *In peace in the self-same I will sleep, and I will rest.**

O desirable peace, which surpasses all sense, and transcends all understanding! O joyful peace, by which the mind is absorbed in the interior life, and, forgetful of all external things, reposes happily in the Lord! O sweet peace, through which and in which the spirit, soaring above itself, and absorbed in the riches of ineffable glory, passes wholly into God! Happy, thrice happy is that soul which deserves to be often thus cherished in the bosom of her Spouse, and frequently to repose in this manner in the embraces of her Beloved. It is not to be told what joy she feels in this peace, while she cannot contain herself for the abundance of spiritual delights, while she is all filled with an incomprehensible and inestimable sweetness, and being filled she is inebriated, and being inebriated she is brought into the haven of holy security.

* Ps. iv. 9.

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3. But, alas! while we bear about us a corruptible body, we cannot long enjoy this holy and secret union with God. For the Spouse approaches and withdraws; now he shows himself, and again he hides himself. O what distaste for present things, what groans, what sighs, invade the holy soul when it returns to itself from these raptures, when it falls back from such riches to such poverty, from such delights to such misery, from so comforting a peace of spirit to such unwelcome distractions and temptations! But yet these groans and sighs bring her meanwhile no little consolation; and they induce the spouse to hasten his return.

4. There are few to be found who attain to this perfection, who shine with such purity and simplicity, who dwell in the citadel of highest charity and contemplation; nor does God lead all to such heights. Other pious souls, indeed, whose lives are not so holy, also enjoy interior peace in this pilgrimage, but not to such a degree as those who are perfect.

CHAPTER XV

GOD IS TO BE LOVED WITHOUT MEASURE, BUT MEN WITHIN LIMITS

1. God alone can satisfy the mind.
2. That man is wretched who is not on fire with love of God.
3. Disordered affections distract the soul from God.

1. THE more free thou art interiorly from the burden of passing things, and the more simple are thy affections, the more easily and happily wilt thou be able to devote thyself to God. Whatever is sought for, except God, occupies the mind, but satisfies it not. God alone will fulfil thy desires; in God alone thou wilt find true rest. He is that one thing necessary, and that Supreme Good, in which consist the fulness and perfection of all things that are beautiful and give delight. Wherefore it is meet to seek and to desire earnestly him alone; other things are not to be sought after, except so far as they may assist us in loving and honouring him. He is to be loved above all things; he is to be loved with all our mind, and all our heart, and with all our soul. As much as thou understandest, as

much as thou knowest, as much as thou canst, so much do thou love him. Love him according to the measure of thy strength and the degree of grace that is given thee. If thou canst love but imperfectly, keep alive within thee the desire, at least, of loving more perfectly: humble thyself, and say to him: *Thine eyes did see my imperfect being.**

2. Woe to that man who loves not God! For he is never truly serene, never truly calm; he is a slave to his vices, he follows vanity; he lives not, indeed, but remains in death; he is dead, he is nothing. Let not the soul fear that seeks after God; but let her tremble that seeks him not. Endeavour, as much as lieth in thee, to despise and reject whatever calls thee away or distracts thee from the love of thy Creator. Learn to expel vain desires, and to reject useless cares and solicitude.

3. Strive to break the bonds of untimely familiarity with others, and to sever the ties of inordinate love of relations, or of any temporal things. In short, accustom thyself skilfully to repel and avoid whatever may entangle and dissipate thy heart. Thou must never seek to be especially loved by any one, but seek that God may be perfectly loved by all men. Thou shalt not greatly desire

* Ps. cxxxviii 16.

the bodily presence of any one, except for the sake of spiritual advancement; and even in that case it must not be desired with disturbance and impatience of mind. If thou lovest spiritually those who live piously, thou wilt easily endure their absence; for those whom thou lovest sincerely in the Lord, will always be present to thee in the Lord.

CHAPTER XVI

FOR WHAT END AND IN WHAT MANNER THE HOLY SCRIPTURES SHOULD BE READ

1. Spiritual exercises should be varied.
2. The reading of Scripture is of the greatest profit.
3. Not human eloquence but divine wisdom to be sought in holy reading.
4. Method and order in reading.
5. Obscure passages should be read reverently.
6. An imperfect memory should not hinder holy reading.
7. Apply what you read to yourself.

1. DEVOTE thyself to reading, to sermons, and to other spiritual exercises. Let reading prevent weariness in prayer; let prayer or meditation season the study of books; and let both reading and prayer be relieved and strengthened by intervals of honest manual labour. For variety in our exercises is of great assistance, especially to those who have not yet received the more perfect gifts of the Holy Spirit. If, therefore, when thou art reading, thou dost leave it before thou art weary of it, to occupy thyself with prayer or meditation; and again, before thou art weighed down by the effort of prayer, thou dost seek

afresh the exercise of reading, and dost opportunely intermingle writing or some other external employment; thou wilt retain strength and freshness of mind. But if, forgetting thy own weakness, thou wilt persist in prolonging thy reading or thy prayer beyond the proper time, and even till it becomes distasteful, thou wilt be utterly inert and worthless, and reluctant to return to the exercise with which thou hast been wearied and disgusted.

2. Read willingly whatever is of spiritual profit; labouring earnestly to learn the manner of a holy life, and how to know and love God. Vain is reading which does not subserve either piety or a just and reasonable necessity. When thou preparest to read holy books, let thy intention be simple; be led by the desire of pleasing God, joined with holy humility; otherwise, if thou shouldst be led by evil curiosity and pride, thy reading will be full of peril. For thou mayest easily convert into poison to thyself the wholesome honey which thou shouldst suck from the flowers of Holy Scripture; either working out for thyself I know not what marvellously perverse interpretations, or approving those which have been devised by others. It behoves us to lean in all things upon the Catholic Faith, humbly to follow the footsteps of the

orthodox Fathers, and to cling most firmly to the dogmas of Mother Church, not pertinaciously following our own opinion. If, having leisure, and God giving the grace, thou dost devote thyself in earnest to spiritual reading, and dost bring a pious mind to the study of the word of God, thou wilt be marvellously strengthened in thy holy resolutions; thy spirit will be exhilarated, and thou wilt experience unspeakable delights, utterly unknown to those who are devoted to vanity and worldly pursuits, and seek not after eternal things. To such, indeed, holy reading is not bread but a stone.

3. Remember also that the good of the soul consists not in eloquence or in beauty of words. Never, therefore, mock or despise what is spoken holily indeed, but not politely nor eloquently; for such levity is an evident sign of a vain and arrogant mind. In reading require not, I say, refined language, if it is absent; nor rashly despise it when thou dost find it; but receive with thankfulness all that is good and useful, whether it be expressed in rude and simple words, or in cultivated and elegant language; and be not weary of often reading or hearing the same things. Those who look for polished diction rather than for fruitful teaching, are like those who chase butterflies instead of stags, or collect

leaves and straws for apples. The excessive love of eloquence very easily turns away the minds of the careless from God and from piety, and bringing them to the precipice of pride and self-love, renders them, as it were, godless and ungodly. The heathens, who are ignorant of the humility of the Gospel, extol and admire eloquence; but Christians commend and embrace holiness of life. He who thinks not humbly of himself, who loves not God, is in reality dumb and childish, though he be thought learned and accomplished. Yet it is not eloquence itself, but the abuse of eloquence which is to be condemned.

4. Confine thyself prudently to a certain course of reading, and observe some rule; for unsteady reading, if there is no good reason for it, dissipates rather than improves the mind.

5. When any obscure passages occur in Holy Scripture which thou canst not understand, hold them in reverence, and pass on simply, unless there be any cause for doing otherwise; for thus thou wilt happily avoid both curiosity and labour. Such is the virtue of divine words, that they bring forth great fruit in the faithful soul, not only when they are perfectly understood, but also when they are piously received without being clearly understood; nor did our Lord say in vain, *The*

*words that I have spoken to you, are spirit and life.**

6. Again, be not grieved because thou canst not remember all that thou readest or hearest. For, as a vessel through which water is often poured remains clean, though all the water has run off, so the pious mind through which spiritual doctrine often passes is kept pure, even if the holy words themselves remain not.

7. When thou derivest from thy reading spiritual consolation, tranquillity of mind, pious affections, and a will prompt to fulfil the commands of God, thou dost reap truly great and important fruit from it. Do not always refer to others, but rather apply to thyself what is written or spoken about vices: lest thou embarrass and taint thy mind with various suspicions and rash judgements.

* John vi 64.

CHAPTER XVII

OF THE NECESSITY AND UTILITY OF DEVOUT PRAYER

1. The advantages of prayer.
2. The first companion of prayer is perseverance.
3. Consciousness of sin should not break perseverance.
4. The second companion of prayer is faith in God's presence.
5. God always gives something when we ask.
6. The third companion of prayer is attention.
7. Attend as far as possible to the words you say.

1. DILIGENCE in prayer is of the first necessity to thee, for prayer is an impenetrable armour, a certain refuge, a secure haven, and a most safe stronghold. This one thing repels from the mind all evils, and brings into it all that is good. It purifies the soul, remits the punishment due to sins, repairs former negligence, wins divine grace, extinguishes evil desires, quells the unruly passions of the soul, conquers the enemy, overcomes temptations, softens calamities, puts to flight sadness, infuses joy, brings peace, unites man to God, and thus united raises him to eternal glory. By prayer thou wilt obtain all that can be useful to thee.

2. But if thou dost not at once obtain what thou askest, see that thou be not disturbed: for God in his mercy sometimes defers to grant those things which are rightly asked: not that he desires to refuse, but that he may afterwards grant more abundantly and more profitably, and that he may exceedingly reward the faith, the patience, and perseverance of him who asks.

3. Never say to thyself what was said by the blind man in the Gospel, whose bodily eyes were indeed enlightened, but the eyes of whose mind were not yet perfectly opened: *Now we know that God doth not hear sinners.** Do not, I say, speak thus: for, in truth, God hears sinners, when they pray with a humble heart; otherwise, it would be sad indeed for the people of God, since they are all sinners, and need the mercy of God.

And if anyone asserts with the blind man restored to sight, that sinners are not heard by God; that opinion holds good of those only who will not amend their lives. Therefore, although thou mayest be a sinner, thou must not on that account despairingly despise thy prayer, which God despises not, but holds in esteem, and keeps stored up in his divine records.

* John ix 31.

4. Nor let it worry thee if, when thou prayest, God Himself, or an angel, or one of the blessed from heaven, appear not to announce to thee that thy prayers are heard; for that is neither necessary, nor indeed expedient. Otherwise, where would be the merit of faith? Although, such is the goodness of God, that when needful, he vouchsafes visible apparitions. Pray, therefore, humbly, nothing hesitating, but firmly believing that whosoever prays piously, will always be heard by God. Be strenuous, and persevere; and, without doubt, thou wilt in the end experience what Christ truly said: *Ask, and it shall be given you.**

5. He will certainly give what thou askest, if it is expedient for thee to receive it; if not, he will give something else that is for thy good. He knows when and how far to satisfy our desires. When from human weakness thou dost ask what is not for thy good, may he never grant thee thy request. When thou knowest not whether what thou desirest is pleasing to him, learn to pray in this or some similar manner: O Lord, grant this if it is pleasing to thee, if it is expedient; but if it is not pleasing to thee, and is not expedient, let it not come to pass. Thy holy will be done in all things.

* Luke xi 9.

6. Strive to be recollected when thou prayest and praisest God. Do it diligently, and with due reverence; never deliberately consenting to the foolish wanderings of the mind. If, however, thy mind is so unstable and distracted that thou canst not attend to the words of thy prayers, be not on that account angry with thyself, nor cast down; but with a grateful, placid, and tranquil mind do all that is in thy power, offering thy good will to God, and exercising untiring patience. Be humble rather than downhearted. Although thou passest over many words without attention, and then attendest to only one little word; or even though thou canst not pronounce one word with attention, thy labour will not be lost, if thou art watchful and right at heart. Wisely avoid interior perplexity, impetuosity, over-anxiety, and vehement efforts, and beware of seeking after many various methods of keeping thyself attentive; for these things are apt to produce confusion in the mind, and to banish the sweet influence of divine grace.

Let the sense of the sacred words, which the Holy Spirit may suggest to thy understanding, sweetly affect and simply occupy thy mind; and let it not be fatigued or confused by images derived with labour from other sources. If the Holy Spirit should

call away and attract thy spirit to more sublime thoughts, thou must not rashly oppose it, but ever follow his leadings; for he knows intimately where, in what manner, and how far thou oughtest to penetrate.

7. As I have said before, when thou prayest, always have thy will determined to attend to what thou art saying; and take heed that thy heart be calmly free from unseasonable thoughts, especially at the beginning of thy prayer. In order that thou mayest the more easily do this, study to keep thy mind free at other times. Having done this, commit the rest to God, and remain calm and joyful. For God will not impute to thee the distractions by which through frailty thou art carried away against thy will. Thou wilt fully satisfy him, even if thou art unable to attend. Humble patience, cheerful gratitude of heart, and holy confidence in him, will fully make up for what may be sinful in the dissipation of the senses. God regards and delights no less in our reasonable efforts and pious desires to do right, than in our work itself. He knows wherefore he permits us to be sometimes so unstable in mind; he knows in what manner he intends either to defend or to purify our souls from the stains of pride, self-love, and vainglory.

CHAPTER XVIII

OF THE WORSHIP OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN AND OF THE SAINTS. OF PSALMODY

1. The sublime dignity of God's Virgin Mother.
2. In what sense she is called our hope.
3. She is devoutly to be invoked.
4. The other saints should also be honoured.
5. The value of the canonical office.

1. FREQUENTLY turn to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God; invoke her, love her, praise her; she is, indeed, most worthy of all honour; and however much we may exalt her, she surpasses all our praise. Her Son is the Son of the Heavenly Father; she conceived God in her virginal womb, she brought forth God, she nourished God at her own breasts, she carried God in her arms, and nursed him in her lap. What can be more sublime, what more honourable, than to be called and to be the Mother of God? What dignity is higher or more wonderful than this? It is certain that, beside God, nothing can be imagined more divine than the Mother of God.

2. Woe to the wretched and unhappy heretics, who are wickedly opposed to so

great a Virgin, who strive to obscure her glory and splendour! Woe, I say, to those who despise the worship of so great an Empress! They shudder and are indignant because we call her the hope of our life, and our saving reconciliation. What, say they, do you esteem Mary a goddess? do you thus place your hope in human nature? We do not, indeed, adore Mary as a goddess; but we venerate her as the Mother of God, as next to God (although she might deserve to be called goddess, since the Saints in Scripture are called gods).* We do not so place our hope in man, we do not so trust in Mary, as if she had not received from God all that she is, all that she has, and all her power; but we confess that she has received everything from him by whom she was created and chosen, and that she can do all things in him whom she has brought forth. The Creator has given to his creature, the Son to his Mother, unspeakable power, and has willed to honour her with a singular privilege: and for that reason we place in her our hope of salvation, not indeed before the Lord, but after the Lord; for we look for salvation chiefly from the Lord, whom we acknowledge to be the source of all good.

3. Abominate the blasphemies and the impudence of those Anti-Marians (praying

* *Cf.* Ps. lxxxi 6.

for them, nevertheless), and hold the honour of Mary dear: for she is the perfect example of all purity and holiness, the singular refuge of sinners, the most safe refuge of all who are pressed by temptation, misfortune, or any sort of persecution. She is the most powerful Queen of Heaven, the most liberal dispenser of graces, the most merciful Mother of all the faithful. She is all mild, all gracious, all sweet, all kind, not only to the just and perfect, but also to sinners and to the desperate; and when she perceives that they call upon her from their hearts, she instantly assists, receives, and encourages them, and with maternal confidence reconciles them to their Judge, whom they fear. She spurns no one, she refuses no one; she consoles all, she opens the breast of her pity to all, and quickly helps even those who call upon her ever so little. By her innate goodness and sweetness she often strongly attracts and excites to the love of her those who are not inclined towards God; that so they may be prepared for grace, and rendered at length fit for the kingdom of heaven. Such she is, such she has been made by God, such she has been given to us: that no one may be terrified of her, no one fly from her, no one fear to approach her. It is impossible that the assiduous and humble worshipper of Mary

should perish. Make her, therefore, thy friend above all.

4. Thou must also pay devout homage to the other Saints of God, fully believing that they receive thy prayers and the pious affection of thy heart. If thou wishest to choose some to venerate more especially, and to whose patronage thou wouldst more frequently commend thyself, it is praiseworthy to do so.

5. Happy wilt thou be if thou occupiest thyself sedulously in psalmody; and dost deserve to taste the sweetness and gift of peace which it contains. For psalmody is the most precious peace of the mind, the joyful serenity of the heart, the sweet consolation of the mourner, and the becoming composure of the joyful. Psalmody puts to flight demons, invites angels, opens heaven, and, as it were, compels God to have mercy. I would far rather taste the sweetness of psalms even without fully understanding them, than to know their exact sense without any interior devotion.

CHAPTER XIX

OF MEDITATION ON OUR LORD'S PASSION

1. Meditation on the life and passion of our Lord is the surest way to perfection.
2. Therefore study it and meditate upon it.
3. Dwell upon it with keenness and fervour.

1. I ADVISE thee, above all things, faithfully to exercise thy mind in reflecting on those things which our Lord Jesus Christ did for us, which he said, and which he suffered for us: for thou wilt nowhere find so prompt a remedy against the allurements of vanities and trifles, against the rottenness of vicious passions and affections, against the storms of temptations and calamities, against the depression of sadness and faint-heartedness; nowhere wilt thou find so certain a means of attaining to all virtue and to the perfection of all virtue, as in the life of our Saviour. By the frequent consideration of it the mind is most efficaciously purified from the stains of sins and vices, and, being brought to a certain holy confidence and intimate familiarity with our Lord himself, it is illuminated with celestial light. For this same

Jesus to whom it clings is *a consuming fire,** *making purgation of sins;*† the same Jesus whom it loves is *the true light which enlighteneth every man.*‡

2. Therefore, according to the grace that is given thee, study the life of the Lord Jesus; meditate upon it, delight in it. Let this be thy repose in labour, thy solace amid difficulties, thy defence against temptations, thy joy under contumely. Keep it hidden day and night, like a precious pearl, in the secret of thy heart; bear it about with thee everywhere; look upon it lovingly with the eyes of thy mind, whether thou art at home or abroad, according to the gift of God, by which he insinuates himself into thy heart.

3. Run not through the sacred history in a lackadaisical, perfunctory, or hasty manner; but keep thyself present in spirit, as if thou couldst see before thine eyes the things that were done, and couldst hear the things that were said. Receive and embrace them all with a grateful mind, for they all have the power, if thou art attentive, to relieve and diminish greatly the sorrows of thy exile. No greater benefit has been bestowed on us by God than that which he conferred when

* Deut. iv 24. † Heb. i 3.
‡ John i 9.

he willed to be made man and to suffer for us, wherefore it is but just that we should very frequently dwell in thought upon the dispensation of our redemption, and give thanks for it; for this is most pleasing to God, and most advantageous to ourselves.

CHAPTER XX

SOME METHODS OF MEDITATION ON THE INFANCY OF CHRIST OUR LORD

1. The Annunciation.
2. The Visitation to St Elizabeth.
3. The birth of our Lord.
4. The simplicity and sweetness of such meditations.
5. The very reading of the Gospel stimulates devotion.

1. WHEN thou wishest to recall to mind the beginnings of our salvation, if thou delightest in humility, thou canst consider with what peace the Angel Gabriel enters into the chamber of the most holy Virgin Mary, and with what reverence he salutes her. Do thou also enter with him, and attend diligently to every word that is spoken, as well by the angel as by Mary. Contemplate the modesty, the purity, the prudence, the humility, the bashfulness, and holiness of this most blessed maiden; reflect that when she spoke these words: *Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to thy word,** immediately the Son of God, the omnipotent God, was ineffably conceived in her most chaste

* Luke i 38.

womb by the power of the Holy Ghost, became incarnate, and was made man. Marvel at the wonderful mystery, at the immense charity of the Lord, who for us did not disdain to become our brother. Venerate that most sacred womb; rejoice and give thanks.

2. Then, arising together with the most pure Virgin, follow her when she ascends to the hills. Draw near, so that when she enters the house of her cousin Elizabeth, thou mayst hear the mutual salutation of the Virgin and the aged woman, and their holy conversation. O happy women, of whom one bears in her womb the King of Glory, and the other the herald of grace! O precious vessels, breathing the perfume of perpetual gladness! O blessed wombs, about shortly to pour forth new joys over the world! At length, when this most sweet Virgin returns thence, do thou also return; offering thyself to be her faithful companion and lowly servant.

3. Lastly, in company with her, being with child, and with her holy guardian St Joseph, proceed to Bethlehem: and arriving there sympathise with that most tender Virgin, who chose a stable for her resting-place after her long fatigues. Behold her occupied in prayer, and intent upon heavenly contemplation; behold, admire, and love. Rejoice

that in the darkness of the night our Lord, arising out of the deep, hath visited us; rejoice that, without pain and without hurt to her virginity, she hath brought forth for us a Saviour, God and man. Be glad, for the Messias is born; be glad, for the oracles of the Prophets are fulfilled. Enter into the palace of the everlasting King, enter into the stable; see the cradle of the Lord of lords; behold the Creator of the world, a little infant wailing with the sharpness of the cold. Kneel before that divine crib; embrace the tender little feet of thy Redeemer; fix thy lips on them, and kiss them again and again. Let love conquer shame, and let affection overcome fear. Say with devotion, say with humility and gratitude: We adore thee, dearest Babe; we adore thee, sweetest infant; we adore thee, King Emmanuel, the Prince of Peace, the light of the Gentiles, glory be to thee for ever and ever. Hold him, let him not go, except he bless thee.*

4. In like manner thou mayest occupy thyself with the remainder of the Life and conversation of the same Christ our Lord; space does not permit us here to treat of all that the Gospel history relates. And the little meditations which thou wilt make for thyself may perhaps be sweeter than those we

* *Cf.* Isa. vii 14, and ix 6; Cant. iii 4; Gen. xxxii 26.

have proposed. Those which we have given are certainly very simple, and yet they are very sublime. But consider the life and actions of the Saviour, that thou mayest desire to love him, and imitate his humility, patience, charity, and compassion.

5. Even the bare reading of the Life of Christ will bring forth much fruit in thee, if thou receivest piously and reverently the words of the Holy Ghost, which have an unspeakable power concealed within them. For the woman who was suffering from an issue of blood was healed by touching with faith the hem of our Lord's garment. The letter of the Gospel is the hem of his garment.

CHAPTER XXI

A METHOD OF MEDITATION ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD, AND ON THE MOST HOLY TRINITY

1. The agony in the garden.
2. The betrayal by Judas and the taking of our Lord.
3. Several mysteries may be meditated upon each day, or one taken day by day.
4. The excellence of such meditations.
5. Laborious efforts of the imagination should be avoided.
6. Think not of Christ as man, but as God-Man.
7. How we should think of the Holy Trinity.
8. Caution must be observed by the inexperienced.

1. CHIEFLY thou must meditate on the blessed Passion of the Redeemer. Thou mayest, if it so please thee, place on each day before the eyes of thy mind some one part of his Passion. For example; one day thou wilt propose to thyself Christ in the garden, full of grief, kneeling on the ground in prayer, and sweating blood under the pressure of that stupendous agony.* During that day thou wilt meditate on that portion, and, God giving thee grace, thou wilt placidly direct thy interior sight to it, whenever thou shalt be at

* *Cf.* Luke xxii 39-44.

leisure from other serious thoughts, and free from legitimate impediments.

2. On the following day thou wilt in like manner represent to thyself what our Lord suffered, when he was betrayed by Judas, taken captive, bound and led away with insults.* Thou wilt thus go through the Passion of our Lord in order, and, having completed it, thou wilt repeat it from the beginning.

3. If thou shouldst prefer each day to go through several portions of the Passion, or to keep for many days to the meditation of one small portion, or every day to consider that part which represents Christ hanging on the Cross,† thou mayest follow thine inclination. Adopt freely that method which may be most suitable to thy capacity, and most fruitful of devotion.

4. Occupy thyself in this manner according to thy measure with the humanity of Christ. Let this so possess thy mind, that whatever evil phantasy may enter it from other sources shall quickly be banished. Choose this thought in which to repose in safety, so long as thou art not carried on to higher things; for it is a ship in which thou mayest without danger cross the seas of this world, and happily reach thy most blessed home. While thou art

* *Cf.* Mark xiv 43, 66. † *Cf.* John xviii.

still navigating it, God may, however, sometimes powerfully sustain thee in regions where thou wilt be inwardly stripped of all forms and images of things; where all action will cease within thee; where at length, losing thyself, thou wilt happily pass into God. To this the hand of the Lord will sometimes lead thee, if it is expedient for thee to be thus led during the time of thy exile; if it is not expedient, thou wilt not be so led.

5. But take care that thou seek not anxiously for the visible image of the Saviour, if it does not readily occur to thy heart; do thou rather, putting aside a closer representation of his human features and bodily appearance, conceive in thy mind God as a Spirit present to thee within and without; conceive his sweet and most amiable goodness, kindness, and love; dwell upon the same Lord of unspeakable majesty everywhere present, knowing all things, penetrating all things, giving life to all things, sustaining all things without effort, encompassing all things without limit, disposing all things without disquietude, governing all things without weariness. Conceive these things; but make not great efforts in doing so; for some of these thoughts will readily and even necessarily offer themselves to the faithful soul reflecting on the Redeemer of the world.

6. Nor does the faithful soul venerate in Christ the humanity only, but also the divinity. He acknowledges the Word to have been so made flesh, that he ceased not to be the Word.* He loves both, the flesh and the Word; he worships both, man and God, the one Lord Jesus Christ.

7. When the thought of the Holy Trinity enters into thy mind, do not fashion for thyself any absurd idols; thou shalt not imagine the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be as it were three men or three gods; but confess the unity of the Godhead in the Trinity of persons. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; and yet the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are not three gods, but one God. There are three persons, but the substance of the persons is one. This mystery is believed by faith, but is not within the ken of human reason. In the most Holy Trinity there is one and the same nature, one and the same essence, one and the same eternity, one and the same glory, one and the same majesty, one and the same will, one and the same omnipotence. And, as we believe this same Blessed Trinity to be inseparable in substance, so do we confess it to be inseparable in works. Whatever is said to be done by the Father, the same is

* *Cf.* John i 14.

done by the Son, and by the Holy Ghost; whatever is said to be done by the Son, the same is done by the Father, and by the Holy Ghost; whatever is said to be done by the Holy Ghost, the same is done by the Father, and by the Son: for the Trinity is inseparable in its works. So, when we worship the Father, we worship also the Son, and the Holy Spirit; when we worship the Son, we worship also the Father, and the Holy Spirit; when we worship the Holy Spirit, we worship also the Father and the Son: for the Trinity is inseparable in substance.

8. It is not expedient for those who are not well versed in divine things to enquire too curiously into the nature of the Holy Trinity. Let them simply and faithfully believe the Trinity to be such as the Catholic Church confesses it to be; for we shall not be condemned in the day of judgement, because we have not exactly known the nature of our God; but, if we shall have spoken anything rashly, we shall pay the penalty of our rashness.

CHAPTER XXII

PIOUS ASPIRATIONS, OR DARTS OF LOVE

1. Have always at hand a store of ejaculations.
2. The best aspirations are those which the devotion of each person suggests.
3. This form of prayer is an effective means to mystical union.
4. It is rash for a soul still immersed in sins to aspire to this form of prayer.

1. THOU shouldst always have in readiness some efficacious words and prayers in the form of ejaculations, by which thou mayest recall and elevate thy mind to God. We will here subjoin a little collection of such short prayers:

O my soul, behold thy God, behold thy Creator and Redeemer; behold him who washes away thy sins, and sanctifies thee: behold thy life and thy salvation: behold thy only good!

See how far the King of Kings has humbled himself for thy sake; consider what bitternesses thy Saviour bore for thee; weigh with how much charity he loves thee, since for thee he took upon himself so great poverty and so many woes.

Remain with thy Lord, depart not from thy master; for it cannot be well with thee if thou dost desert thy God, nor can it be ill with thee if thou keepest near him.

Forsake the many things, and embrace the one, for one thing is necessary.* There is one who loves thee unutterably; do thou also love one above all.

O good Jesus, O compassionate Shepherd, O sweet Master, O King of eternal glory, I adore thee, I bless and thank thee, who hast so loved me, who hast done such great things, and hast borne such indignities for me. *Be merciful to me a sinner.*† Cleanse, heal, and strengthen me; direct, teach, and enlighten me.

O that I had not hitherto been ungrateful to thee! O that I might even now be pleasing to thee! O that all evil passions and affections were dead in me! O that I could stand before thee truly humble and gentle, truly free and calm!

O that thou alone didst possess my heart! O that I utterly despised all transitory things! O that I might seek after thee alone, attach myself to thee alone, and inseparably cling to thee!

O that I might most ardently love thee! O that I might ever pant after thee with most

* *Cf.* Luke x 42. † Luke xviii 13.

burning desires! Alas, O my Lord, when shall I worship thee with a pure, simple, and joyful mind? when shall I serve thee with a quiet, steadfast, and serene conscience? when will my spirit be absorbed in the immensity of thy love?

What do I desire besides thee? or what can all things profit me without thee? Thou alone art sufficient to my soul.

O my God, O my love, O my desire, O my refuge! O my consolation, my hope, and my trust! O my peace, my rest, and my light! O my glory, my happiness, and all my joy! O my sweetness, my treasure, and my only good!

When shall I see thee? when shall I be with thee? when will this world be silent to me? when will all the hindrances, all the vicissitudes of this life cease for me? when shall I be delivered from the miserable captivity of this present exile? When will the shadows of mortality retire, and the day of eternity break?* When shall I have laid down the burden of this body, and happily praise thee with thy saints to all eternity? Have mercy on me, O my Lord Jesus, have mercy on me; for my soul trusteth in thee.†

2. Innumerable other aspirations (for so we name these short ejaculatory prayers)

* *Cf.* Cant. ii 17. † *Cf.* Ps. lvi 1.

may be made, or may be sought for out of the Holy Scriptures. Those which we have here given may perchance be of use to some; but those which are suggested to each one by his own devotion, and the grace of the Holy Spirit, are sweeter than what are suggested by the feeling and devotion of others.

3. The exercise which consists in aspirations and short prayers of this sort, is most effectual in rooting out vices, and prompting to love. However, the faithful soul that is given to this practice must not be disquieted if it perhaps rarely feels intimately united with God, to whom it aspires; for God receives its good will and holy desires just as if the soul were melted with love, and were perfectly united to him.

4. That soul which has only just come out of Egypt, and which is still much disfigured by the ugliness of sin, must not presume; that is, it must not rashly offer itself to the most sacred embraces of the Heavenly Spouse; but, sitting at the feet of the Lord, it must first strive to wash away its stains, to cultivate beautifulness, to arrange its garments, to correct its manners; and, when all these have been changed and amended, it may then more freely (still observing due reverence) lift itself up, and humbly rise to the sublime kisses of the eternal King.

CHAPTER XXIII

OF DISCRETION IN UNDERTAKING, CONTINUING, AND GIVING UP PIOUS EXERCISES

1. We cannot always be thinking holy thoughts; but we can be resolved never to consent to unworthy ones.
2. God sees us always.
3. Prudence and discretion.
4. Not all are raised to the heights of contemplation.
5. Follow the leading of grace: try not to outstrip it.

1. When prevented from thinking of divine things by travelling, or conversation, or any other occupation and reasonable cause, see that, at least, thou think not of evil or unworthy things. God does not command that, rapt in sublime contemplation, thou shouldst be ever intent on heavenly things, nor does he give such grace to all his elect: but he does command thee to withdraw thy mind, as far as in thee lies, from all wicked and foolish thoughts: and if any unworthy idea should suggest itself, he wills that thou shouldst instantly reject it, and, by all possible means, keep thy higher reason free from

consenting to it. In the mystical body of Christ, those who are distinguished by the grace of more perfect contemplation, are called the eyes; others are the hands or the feet. But not only the eyes, but also the hands and the feet will be saved, when Christ shall gather together all his members to himself. Let, therefore, thy thoughts be innocent and self-controlled; let thy heart be pure and peaceful, and avoid with diligence whatever might defile it, whatever might disturb the quiet of thy mind.

2. God everywhere beholds thee, and perfectly knows thy most secret intentions and affections. He is so present to thee, he is so within thee, that without him thou canst not even move a finger. Be firmly persuaded of this, believe this, and love and reverence his presence; be ashamed to admit anything that might be displeasing to the eyes of so exalted and so intimate a beholder.

3. Observe in all things a holy discretion; for it is not expedient that, without regard to thy infirmity, thou shouldst at once attempt to do whatever good thou readest of, or hearest that others have done. Learn to follow humbly the grace given thee, and not impatiently to forestall it. Thou shalt not, I say, with unruly vehemence, force thy

mind into regions to which it cannot yet ascend; nor violently urge thyself to do things that are quite beyond the strength either of thy body or thy mind.

4. If it is for thy good that thou shouldst penetrate into the sublime wonders of heavenly mysteries, the grace of God will lead thee thither better than thy own importunate efforts and endeavours. Thou wishest, perhaps, to reach the heights rapidly, thou wouldst fly rather than walk towards perfection; but this is granted to few, nor would it be expedient for all. Be humble, sit down in the lowest place; one day, perchance, the Father of the family may say to thee, *Friend, go up higher.** Why dost thou shake thy head? why dost thou afflict thy soul? God does not require that thou shouldst cruelly torture thyself in the service which thou renderest him; but he wills thee to be whole and vigorous both in mind and body, unless he himself has otherwise ordained it for thy good.

5. Why art thou disturbed that thou canst not pursue the practices which are followed by others? It matters not by what road thou goest, so that thou dost arrive at charity. Divers ways lead to it, and the way which is suitable to one is by no means suitable to

* Luke xiv 10.

another; for the same kind of exercise is not adapted for all. Take up, therefore, such exercises as are within thy capacity; not regarding what or how much others have done and are doing, but what and how much thou art able to do.

CHAPTER XXIV

SOME RULES OF DISCRETION WITH REGARD TO EXERCISES

1. Moderation must be observed in all things.
2. Private devotions should not be multiplied.
3. A good life is continual prayer.
4. The ordinary regular prayers may be offered for special intentions.
5. Moderate austerity should be observed according to each one's state.

1. Be careful not to lay upon thy weak shoulders too heavy a weight, lest, oppressed and overpowered by the burden, thou shouldst be forced to faint and give way. Even in tears of devotion a measure should be observed, lest the head be weakened, especially if those tears are accompanied by strong emotion.

If thou perceivest thy spirit to be wearied with even a single stroke of sensible compunction, thou must warily avoid it. When thou hast the grace of devotion, urge not thy spirit unseasonably to greater fervour; but persevere in tranquil love.

2. Bind not thyself irrevocably to any great and intolerable number of prayers to be said

daily, but rather diminish or increase thy exercises according to thy disposition; unless otherwise obliged by vow or by obedience. If, for some reason, thou hast even entirely omitted these same private and voluntary exercises, be not much grieved on that account, but study to be ever free and quiet in the Lord.

3. Why art thou distressed that thou canst not be always occupied in prayer? If thy life is good, if thou carefully abstainest from sin, if thou employest thy time usefully, if thou dost truly humble thyself in the sight of the Lord, and sigh after God and thy heavenly home, thou dost always pray; for a holy life and holy desires are a continual prayer before God. It is, however, fitting that thou shouldst be devoted to the practice of prayer, so that thou mayest, if not continually, at least frequently, use pious doxologies and prayers.

4. When thou desirest to pray at greater length for any of the living or the dead, or when thou wouldst dwell longer on the worship of any saint, if thou hast not leisure, or if, for any other reason, thou fearest disturbance of mind, it will not be necessary to change the usual order of the pious exercises; but it will be enough if thou dost determine before God to offer them for the welfare of

those persons, living or dead, or for the honour of that saint. For thy works will be valued and received by the Lord according to thy intention. We truly venerate the saints, when we worship God, who made and sanctified them; so, again, we truly worship God, when we venerate the saints, in whom he dwells, and whom he has already united to himself in heaven.

5. Thou shouldst not deny to the body the necessary indulgence of food and sleep; thou shouldst not be very severe in that respect, unless thou hast learnt for certain by a revelation of the Holy Spirit that thou wouldst please God by a singular abstinence. For an excessive diminution of those refreshments (like too great exertion of a moderate intellect, or too vehement use of the imagination) injures for the most part both the spirit and the weak body, and often causes madness. Fasts, vigils, and exterior works, are, indeed, pleasing to God, when they are undertaken with discretion for the sake of God himself; yet purity of heart is far more pleasing to him, humility and charity far more acceptable. For these observances are commanded for the sake of the virtues, not the virtues for the sake of them. Therefore, as far as in thee lies, arrange, regulate, and dispose all things, so that thou mayest never lose thy

interior liberty, never confuse thy mind, never overtask thy strength; and yet never rashly omit those things to the observing or doing of which thou art bound by vow or by obedience.

CHAPTER XXV

FURTHER RULES OF DISCRETION

1. Private devotions should be faithfully followed, but not obstinately.
2. Each should follow the promptings of the Holy Ghost.
3. The dangers of sensible sweetness.

1. TAKE care not to perform thy exercises with obstinate adherence to thy own choice; but even in them deny thyself. Thou shouldst carefully observe, and promptly follow the interior calls and the hidden force and impulse of the Holy Spirit, and be ready in obedience to his will, but not out of levity and inconstancy, to change those exercises, to give them up, and to resume them.

2. In thy private prayers and holy aspirations to God, it will sometimes, perhaps, be best for thee to utter thy prayer peacefully in words; sometimes it will suit thee better to pray mentally. At one time thou wilt take pleasure in passing through some parts without much delay, at another in dwelling long on parts of thy meditation. Sometimes thou wilt choose to pray by desires alone, or in very few words, repeating them often with sweetness

and devotion; sometimes to pray in many and various words. It will be pleasant to thee, sometimes, to read thy prayers out of a book, sometimes to offer them to God without the aid of a book. Sometimes psalmody, sometimes another sort of contemplation may be most sweet to the taste of thy heart. In short, thou wilt be drawn to different practices at different times, and it will be good for thee to follow now one and now another form of exercises. For the Holy Spirit influences the interior man in various ways, and leads him by divers paths to the embraces of divine love; and we must ever be most watchful for his calls and promptings, that we may always bend to his will, utterly abandoning our own choice.

3. Seek not after sweetness in thy exercises from impure motives; rest not in it, but pass on through it to God. There is great danger in spiritual gluttony, by which we abuse the sweetness of grace, and turn it to our own pleasure. The soul which is deeply infected with this vice cannot be called a modest and faithful servant to Christ; for she will not serve God generously, but desires God's gifts rather than God himself. She is a mercenary slave, not a freeborn daughter. If that sensible sweetness passes away, she becomes at once all full of bitterness, indignation,

turbulence, and impatience, and abandons the pursuit of piety; and, shaking off the trammels of fear and shame, she gives herself up entirely to external consolations. That is to say, if God wills to give her pleasure, she serves God; if not, she withdraws from him. On the other hand, the soul which deserves to be called the faithful handmaid, or the modest spouse of Christ, reposes not in the gift of God, but in God himself. Whether God bestows on her interior sweetness or not, she remains calm, she cheerfully serves her Spouse, faithfully clings to him, and constantly loves him. She wishes the will of God to be done rather than her own. Therefore, be careful that thy intention be ever chaste and pure; seek after the joy of the salvation of God,* not so much for thy own delight, as that thou mayest please God.

* Ps. l 14.

CHAPTER XXVI

OF SENSIBLE DEVOTION. REVELATIONS. CONSOLATIONS. THE HOLY EUCHARIST

1. A rational devotion is more pleasing to God than emotional sweetness.
2. God turns dryness to our own soul's good.
3. Revelations are not to be sought or desired.
4. Be humble and calm when things go well with thee.
5. Interior consolations are not the signs of holiness.
6. Reverence due to the holy Eucharist.

1. If, when thou art praying, or offering the holy Sacrifice, or meditating on divine things, or occupied in spiritual reading, or doing any other holy work, thou art devoid of the sensible affection of devotion, do thou yet persevere in what thou hast begun; and, with a pious desire of pleasing God, offer to him the barrenness of thy heart, and thy labour, to his eternal praise. For thus will that dryness which thou sufferest be no less pleasing to him than the abundance of interior sweetness; yea, verily, more pleasing; because reasonable devotion is, by far, safer and more acceptable to God than sensible devotion. Devotion is reasonable when we hate and

execrate every sin, and worship God with a ready will; and when we strenuously embrace and execute whatever we know to be pleasing to God. If thou hast this devotion, thou wilt in no wise fail of thy reward, even if thou be without the other kind of devotion.

2. O with what wisdom God cleanses us from pride, if we are infected with it; or defends us from it, if we are yet free! How mercifully he shuts out the love of this exile from our souls, and compels us to sigh after that, our blessed country. O how graciously he works out our salvation, even when we understand it not! We ought, therefore, to praise him, even when he seems to leave us exposed to divers miseries and calamities. For, in truth, he never can desert those whom he sees to be humble and of good will.

3. Be not curious in seeking for heavenly revelations: for those who rashly desire, and lightly give credence to them, lay themselves open to many dangers, and to many snares of the devil. For our common enemy often transforms himself into an angel of light, that he may deceive the unwary. If thou dost not at once believe a vision shown to thee, but remainest humbly in doubt, till thou hast more evident and certain knowledge of it, thou offendest not God, even if it should have been sent by God himself.

Those revelations which are made from heaven to the pious console and soothe the mind and make it humble; those visions, on the contrary, which are concocted by the craft of the demons, do nothing but disturb and harden the heart, and render it perverse.

4. When thou art kindly visited by God, when all is tranquil and serene, refer what thou hast received to his pure grace and mercy, not to thine own industry, nor to thine own merits or efforts. On no account do thy own pleasure, nor give thyself up to foolish joy or dangerous security; but keep thyself ever in holy watchfulness and fear; prepared to accept spiritual tribulation and dryness, if it should be God's will to send them to thee again, and be not of the number of those described by Solomon, when he said, *The prosperity of fools shall destroy them.**

Do not unseasonably magnify to thyself the gift thou hast received, nor love to speak of it everywhere to others (though thou mayest reverently and humbly divulge it, if any spiritual good or necessity require it), but rather turn away thy thoughts from the gift itself, as if thou hadst received nothing, and dwell upon God. If thou wishest to dwell upon it more particularly in thy own mind,

* Prov. i 32.

do it for this end only, that thou mayest be more aware of the goodness of God towards thee, and of thy own ingratitude towards God. Attribute to God all that is of God, and be grateful; but to thyself ascribe nothing but sin. Acknowledge thyself to be an unprofitable servant, unworthy of any favour or solace; in order that the more progress thou dost make, the more thou mayest humble thyself. For humility alone will preserve uncorrupted the good that is in thee.

5. Those feelings of sensible love and sweetness, though they may usually be signs of salvation, must not be considered undoubted indications thereof, unless the Holy Spirit has so revealed it. For they are sometimes natural feelings rather than divine; and they may arise even in a heart that is far distant from God. Wherefore, we ought ever to grow more vile in our own eyes, and to steer between filial fear and holy hope, so long as we are tossed upon the waves of this present life.

6. When thou art about to receive the most Holy Eucharist, see that thou assist not unworthily at that tremendous and heavenly feast. Cast down thy spirit, and hide thyself in the deepest valley of humiliation; most heartily confess thyself to be a sinner.

Beseech the Lord that he will deign to purify thy soul, and to adorn it with his merits and virtues. Approach with firm faith, with certain hope, and sincere love, in memory of his most dear Incarnation, Passion, and Death: so that thou mayest be able to say with truth, *With desire I have desired to eat this Passover.** Having at length received the King of glory, be watchful lest thou admit anything that may offend the eyes of so great a guest. And if, perchance, thou hast done anything amiss, and hast wounded thy soul by sin, fly instantly to the remedy of penance, and to the medicine of the divine mercy.

* Luke xxii 15.

CHAPTER XXVII

OF OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE. OF MODEST AND EDIFYING BEHAVIOUR

1. Public duties always come before private.
2. Heresy springs from pride and disobedience.
3. Be ever ready to submit to the decrees of the Church.
4. Obstinacy must be broken.
5. See thou give scandal to none.
6. Practise modest restraint and avoid levity.
7. Relaxation is, however, sometimes desirable.
8. Correct all disordered affections.

1. ALWAYS prefer to thy private exercises, the duties to be performed in community, and those which relate to obedience or to the necessities of our neighbour, so that thou mayest cease to belong to thyself. Obedience is the greatest virtue; it is, certainly, the chief of virtues; on the other hand, to refuse to obey is the most grievous wickedness. Thou wilt, sometimes, make more progress in perfection of life by an insignificant work done under obedience, than by sublime exercises performed by thy own choice. What thou doest through disobedience, is utterly rejected by God, and, instead of being useful

to thee, turns wholly to thy injury. Do thou, therefore, obey God, obey the Catholic Church, obey those who hold the place of God; obey thy Prelates, and reverence them, even if they seem not to lead very good lives. For, if thou obeyest not these, thou obeyest not God; since he saith, *He that heareth you, heareth me; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me.** Thou shalt prefer nothing whatever to holy obedience; but humbly submit thyself in all things which are not certainly evil.

2. Heresies have no other origin than pride and disobedience. For what is it that heretics do? They deride the simplicity which is in Christ; they contemn the holy traditions and customs of the Church, they impiously call them vain dreams of men and empty ceremonies; with presumptuous daring they heap up blasphemies against the Saints of God, against the Virgin Mary the Mother of Christ, against the Sacraments of our religion, and, lastly, even against the Blessed Trinity; they spurn, ridicule, hate, and persecute all faithful Catholics; they esteem themselves alone to be wise, evangelical, and full of the Holy Spirit; they make a monstrous confusion of dogmas, they cling pertinaciously to their own opinions; they

* Luke x 16.

will not follow the footsteps of the orthodox Fathers, they will not humble themselves at the feet of Mother Church; but, full of arrogance, full of envy and insane fury, they persist in their perverse dogmas; and many of them are led by their blindness and hardness of heart to such a degree of folly that they undergo death with courage and alacrity for the defence of their errors, becoming indeed martyrs, not of Christ, but of Satan. In the martyrs of Christ, holy humility shines forth; in martyrs of the devil, the harshness of pride is conspicuous. Do thou sedulously pray to God for such men, and hold their pestilent opinions in abhorrence.

3. Submit to the decrees of the Church, which is ever governed by the Holy Spirit; follow her teaching, as thou dost the Gospel itself, even if thou shouldst see that many of her members, not only among the common people, but also among the rulers and those of high rank, give way to vices; for she is a threshing-floor, containing both wheat and chaff.

4. Beware of obstinacy in thy own opinion. Consult willingly spiritual men and those who fear God; prefer their judgement to thine own. For he goes not readily astray, who is humble and leans more on the prudence of others than on his own; and if in his

simplicity he should err, the Lord will not charge him with the error.

5. Avoid all wayward singularity, and as much as in thee lies, guard against giving scandal to any. If, however, any one is offended at thy doing or saying what is right for thee to do or say, desist not on that account from what thou hast begun, but humbly persevering, and praying for those who are scandalized, commit the affair to God.

6. Carefully rule all thy members, and restrain all thy senses. Be composed and discreet in thy manners, joyful and serene in countenance, modest in look, calm and gentle in voice, innocent and pure in thought, faithful and vigorous in works, kind and affable in conversation; but thy affability must never lead to foolish mirth. Abstain prudently from blameworthy trifling, from violent laughter, from games that are wanting in due propriety and moderation; for by these unbecoming liberties the purity of the heart is injured, and the sanctuary of holy modesty violated.

7. Thou mayest, however, at fitting times relax and recreate thy mind to the honour of God, even in outward amusements, that thou mayest return with the more vigour to thy spiritual exercises; but it must be done

with moderation and from pure motives. God does not command us to refuse all comfort from creatures, which he made for his own praise; he does not enjoin us to separate ourselves from them, except inasmuch as they hinder our love and familiarity towards him. They hinder us, when we are attached to them more or otherwise than is seemly, when we cling to them and rest in them.

8. Every inordinate affection must, therefore, be utterly rooted out; after this is done, these same creatures will not separate us from God, but will lead us to him, as it were, by the hand.

Whatever sweetness, whatever joy, whatever objects worthy of love or admiration, offer themselves to thy senses, receive them with a chaste mind, and learn to refer them to God, or to the state of eternal blessedness. So wilt thou be joyful in the Lord.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE WORLD IS THE GREAT BOOK OF GOD

1. The carnal man cannot read the handwriting of God.
2. The spiritual man reads of the glory and love of the Creator in this book of God.
3. God's daily miracles in the world.
4. God created and conserves all things.

1. If we carefully and wisely reflect upon creatures, they will wonderfully fill our minds with admiration, and greatly inflame us with love of the Supreme Creator. For the whole universe is, as it were, a book written by the finger of God, in which each creature forms a letter. But as one who has not learnt to read, when he looks into an open book, sees indeed the characters of the letters, but understands not their meaning and force; in like manner, he who perceives not the things of God, beholds the external aspect of creatures, but comprehends not their interior meaning. *The senseless man shall not know; nor will the fool understand these things.**

2. But the spiritual man, whose mental eyes are open, when he contemplates the

* Ps. xci 7.

external works of God, inwardly perceives how wonderful is the maker of them; and from the fairness of those things which he is contemplating, he passes on to that Divine Beauty which is fairer than all other beauty, and from whence all beauty springs. To him who is occupied with this joyful contemplation, all things are miraculous; so that in amazement he is forced to exclaim with the prophet: *How great are thy works, O Lord! Thou hast made all things in wisdom.** *Thou hast given me, O Lord, a delight in thy doings; and in the works of thy hands I shall rejoice.*†

3. It certainly ought not to appear to us less astonishing that the juice of the vine should be every year changed into wine (by the disposition of God), than that formerly, in Cana of Galilee, water should, also at his command, have been changed into wine;‡ and it is a greater work to create daily many things which were not, than to restore life to those which were dead. There is no creature so tiny or so vile as not to show forth these three invisible attributes of God—his power, wisdom, and goodness. Therefore, God is known by those things which he has made, as St Paul asserts, saying, *The invisible things of him, from the creation of*

* Ps. ciii 24. † Ps. xci 5.
‡ *Cf.* John ii 7, 8.

*the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made.**

4. How worthy of admiration is it that God should have created out of nothing the heavens, and the earth, and all that they contain; and that he is able to create more, since he is an infinite ocean of substance! He made all things (sin alone he did not make; and, indeed, sin ought not to be called a created substance), he also preserves all things. For, if he did not by his power preserve what he has created, all things would instantly return to nothingness; because, in themselves, they are nothing, and depend entirely on God, by whom they were made. His care extends over all things: he *reacheth from end to end mightily*, and from the angel to the last little worm *ordereth all things sweetly*;† so that not even a leaf can fall from a tree without his providence.

* Rom. i 20. † Wisd. viii 1.

CHAPTER XXIX

CREATED THINGS THE STEPPING-STONES TO GOD

1. The multitude and variety of creatures display the might of God.
2. Their beauty manifests his wisdom.
3. The usefulness of creation to man shows God's kindness.
4. Creation thus considered becomes a ladder by which man mounts to God.

1. THE multitude and greatness of created things manifest the power of the Creator; their beauty and qualities show forth his wisdom; their usefulness declares his goodness. How many things hath God created? Try to number the stars of heaven, the sands of the sea, the dust of the earth, the drops of rain, the feathers of birds, the scales of fishes, the hairs of quadrupeds, the leaves and fruits of trees. Number the men, the birds, the cattle, the plants, the stones; count all other things, if thou canst; if thou canst not, confess that they are innumerable. How great are the things which God hath created? Measure the weight of the mountains, the waters of the rivers, the space of the plains, the height of heaven, the depth of the abyss. Again,

how small are the things which God hath created! For they also relate to quantity; and it requires no less power to create small things out of nothing than the greatest. How small, therefore, are the things created by God! Passing over lifeless things, consider the butterflies, gnats, and flies; the centipedes, ants, and moths; think of all the kinds of insects and animalcules.

2. Then how fitting, how fair, are all the creations of God! Look into the structure of the human body, behold the fabric of heavens, consider the disposition of the elements, and the changes of the seasons, with all other created things; everywhere thou wilt find wonderful harmony, marvellous adaptation and ornament. For, if thou wilt contemplate even the leaf of a tree, thou wilt discover in it a work of stupendous skill. Thou wilt see how fitly it is strongest where it is nearest to the branch of the tree; thou wilt see how beautifully it spreads out, and forms itself, how skilfully it is guarded all round by serrated teeth, and interwoven here and there with ribs; compare any one with another of the same kind; thou wilt find as many teeth in one as in the other; as many ribs in one as in the other; and the same shape in both. What, again, is fairer than light? What pleasanter than the serene sky? What

more glorious than the brilliant sunshine? What more perfect than the order of the moon and the stars? What more lovely than the elegance of the various flowers? What more pleasing than the time of spring? when the gardens, the meadows, the woods, the fields, clothed with reviving beauty, delight the eyes; when the seeds of herbs and little plants, by a power latent in their nature, infused by the Creator himself, spring forth wonderfully out of the earth, and, with thin stems rising upwards, as if spurning death, fitly illustrate the glory of the future resurrection. I speak not of those things which seem unshapely; for even in their unshapeliness there is, sometimes, a beauty, which not a little modifies their appearance. I pass on to those things which delight the hearing, the smell, the taste, and the touch. What more gladsome than the song of the nightingale and the lark? What more pleasing than the music of the harp and lyre? What more sweet than the perfume of roses and lilies? What more delightful than the savour of various fruits and condiments? What softer than silk and fine linen? I omit here both rough and bitter things.

3. But, behold all things, both great and small, beautiful and unsightly, sweet and

bitter, soft and rough, were formed by the Supreme Creator for his own praise, and for the benefit, the use, the teaching, and the comfort of man. We have mentioned a few things, because our space will not allow us to speak of many; but neither can the mind comprehend all things, nor can they be expressed in words.

4. From what hath been said learn to philosophize on those things of which we have not spoken. Contemplate all things with a grateful mind. Speak occasionally to thyself these or similar words: O how powerful and how great is he who created so many and such immense creatures! O how beauteous and how sweet is he who made things so lovely and so attractive! O how good and how liberal is he who has given us all these things! In this manner pass through creatures to the Creator, in creatures admire their maker; with creatures praise their Benefactor. If the eyes of the mind are purified, so that thou canst also contemplate the invisible creatures of God, the rational soul adorned with purity and holiness, the Angels, the Virtues, Powers, Dominations, and the other citizens of the heavenly courts, these miracles will overwhelm thee, and well-nigh transport thee altogether beyond thyself.

CHAPTER XXX

THE DEVOUT MAN MUST CAREFULLY STRIVE TO HAVE A RIGHT INTENTION, AND CULTIVATE PURITY IN ALL THINGS

1. In all things have a right and pure desire to please God.
2. Temperance in eating and drinking after the example of Christ.
3. Fly the occasions.
4. Keep silence, and meddle not with the business of others.
5. Banish idleness and sleepiness.

1. LET this thought precede all thy actions (even when thou hast to eat, to drink, to sleep, or to afford any other solace to thy flesh), that thou desirest to perform them purely for the honour of God. For, as any work, however great and important it may seem in itself, is utterly displeasing to God, if it is done with an impure intention; so a work that in itself is judged to be of no moment, is most pleasing to God when done with a pure intention. Even if, through piety, thou dost but bow thy head before the image of Jesus Crucified, or make a little offering of flowers to the altar of Mary the

Mother of God, or take a single step out of love, thou wilt not be defrauded of thy hope of a just reward.

2. According to the teaching of St Paul, make not provision for the flesh in its concupiscences.* Detest gluttony; take thy food and drink moderately and slowly, avoiding all sensual avidity. Burden not thy stomach overmuch; lest thou shouldst be weighed down, and less ready for interior exercises. But be chiefly on thy guard against a free use of wine. In vain wilt thou aspire to a spiritual life, if thou, like a vile slave to impure pleasures, loadest thyself with food, never restraining the desires of greediness. Avoid with equal care too great indulgence and too great abstinence. For thou mayest be sometimes disinclined even to the little portion of food that is necessary to support nature. If it should happen that thou hast been inattentive, and gone a little beyond the bounds of holy temperance, the sin is not grievous, but yet it must not be neglected. Acknowledge thy fault, sigh, renew thy resolution; and, putting aside all faintheartedness, confide in the Lord. Seek not after refined banquets, and when such are before thee, partake of them as if they were the most simple. Let not the scantiness of

* *Cf.* Rom. xiii 14.

thy food ever provoke thee to anger, or to childish complaints; but be patient. Christ our Lord for thee was given gall and vinegar to drink.* Thou must so admit the satisfaction that is naturally derived from eating and drinking, as not to rest in it; it should occupy thee no more than if thou didst not feel it. Be painstaking in giving thanks for the benefits which are daily bestowed upon thee by God.

3. Avoid with prudence the occasions of evil. If thou art of necessity present where there are evident occasions of sin, fortify thy weakness with prayers, and call upon God, saying, Let my heart, O Lord, and my body be undefiled before thee.† Accustom thyself to turn everything that thou hearest and seest to thy spiritual progress and to the honour of God.

4. Love quiet and silence, dwell in the secret of thy heart, and converse interiorly with thy God. Be not eager to seek out, to hear, to know, or to look into anything that does not concern thee, or that is of no use to thee. Have no curiosity about what is without, nor about the deeds of others; but let thy occupation be within, and about thy own vices. Thou shalt not, I say, attempt to discuss the manners and the lives of others:

* *Cf.* John xix 29. † *Cf.* Ps. cxviii 80.

thou shalt not engage thyself in observing them, unless the duties of thy position require it. And even if duty demands it, this sort of watchfulness must be guarded, so that thy care of others may go only as far as necessity or the good of souls may require, not as far as curiosity or levity of mind might urge thee. In thy affairs, avoid fussiness and a disturbed and impetuous temper, lest thou shouldst lose thy liberty of spirit.

5. Abhor idleness, the parent of all evils, and the certain ruin of the soul; bestir thyself to expel indolence from thy mind. Though thy body may sometimes grow weary, yet thy reason must never yield to sloth; but thou must be prompt in spirit and in will. Thou shouldst not always give way to unseasonable sleepiness; but when it is very urgent, thou mayest yield to it a little, according to the opportunity of the time and place; so that, refreshed by a light and short sleep, thou mayest return with more zest to thy necessary duties.

CHAPTER XXXI

OF GUARDING THE TONGUE AND EARS, AND OF THE LOVE OF OUR NEIGHBOUR

1. Avoid uncharitable and idle words.
2. Quarrels and disputes should be shunned.
3. Praise not thyself: speak no ill of others.
4. Correct others with love, not anger.
5. Listen not to impure or uncharitable talk.
6. Hate no man.
7. Heal quarrels: bear no grudges.
8. Charity is the mark of the servants of God.

1. REFRAIN thy tongue from uncharitable and unbecoming words. Speak wisely what is useful, true, and seemly, when the time and place or some good reason require thee to speak, putting entirely aside all deceit and all culpable dissimulation. The tongue is a little member, but exceedingly dangerous and prone to evil. Do thou diligently restrain it, and govern it prudently.

2. Let all hateful bitterness and all immoderate and unseasonable sharpness be absent from thy words. Fly from disputes; do not readily either assert or deny anything with pertinacity, unless the cause of the faith or the good of souls should require it. If thou

makest no impression when thou hast calmly given utterance to the truth, leave each one to his own judgements, and committing all things to God, keep thyself in peace; for it is better that thou shouldst consult the quiet of thy own conscience by timely yielding, than that thou shouldst inwardly disturb and confuse thyself by unseasonable and clamorous disputes.

3. Neither speak with eagerness of those things which concern thy own praise or the discredit of others, nor listen to them with pleasure. And if it should be necessary to speak or to hear such things, let thy intention be pure and innocent. He labours under a dangerous disease who willingly speaks of the vices of others, and discloses them rashly. Such a one often covers with a false pretext of zeal for piety and justice the things which he says out of mere levity or from a bad disposition.

4. When thou hast to reprove any one, exhort and admonish him rather than reproach or revile him, so long as the matter admits of gentleness. If severity is necessary, see that thou art severe without bitterness. Let not anger or any selfish motive urge thee to more vehement correction, but only the love of God and the good of souls. Let thy reason remain ever tranquil. Let holy discretion rule and temper even the severity

of thy words. Persecute the sin, not the man. For man is a good thing, created by God; sin is a bad thing, made by man. When thou seemest outwardly to inveigh sharply against any one, inwardly pity him with secret affection, and in thy heart prefer him to thyself. If thou feelest thy mind to be seriously disturbed, either defer the correction till the disturbance has passed away, or speak but a few words without impetuosity.

5. Cut short as far as in thee lies, without rudeness, all discourse that is immodest or otherwise pernicious, and divert it to other subjects. Thou must abhor not only to consent, but even to lend an ear to detractors. Never show partiality to the sins of others.

6. Hate no man, nor show to any one that thy affection is diminished, however much he may have injured thee.

If an aversion to another arises in thy mind, thou must immediately suppress it: and if thou canst not succeed in extinguishing it, let thy reason resist it. When God is offended, then indeed thou mayest suspend thy accustomed familiarity with the sinner, in order that he, seeing thee changed, may more readily look into his own heart, and, acknowledging his sin, may more quickly correct himself: thou must not, however, lay aside thy kindliness, nor allow thyself to feel harshly towards him.

7. If a difference should arise between thee and another, try at once to restore peace and to treat of reconciliation; so that no vestige of the quarrel may remain in thy heart. Hatred of our neighbour is a huge evil, a huge evil indeed; and while it occupies the mind, nothing that we do can be pleasing to God.

8. Though thou mayest fast much, and give abundant alms, though thou mayest assiduously frequent the church, and pray continually, though thou mayest daily offer the heavenly sacrifice upon the altar: yet if thou hatest thy brother, thou art not of the number of the sons of God. By love are the children of God distinguished from the children of the devil. This is a tremendous saying, but it is true. Truth himself saith: *By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one for another.** The Apostle of Truth, St John, saith: *He who loveth not his brother is not of God.*† Of whom is he, therefore? Every one is clearly either of God, or of the devil. Love all men purely, and honour all: be of good will, and, as far as thou canst, do good to all: look upon all with friendly eyes, as brothers and sisters, and most excellent creatures of God, made for eternal blessedness, that thou mayest be pleasing to thy Father who is in heaven.

* John xiii 35. † 1 John iv 7, 8.

CHAPTER XXXII

OF JUDGEMENT AND CENSURE OF OTHERS. OF WATCHFULNESS OVER OURSELVES BY DAY AND BY NIGHT

1. Judge no one rashly.
2. Be ready to excuse others.
3. If correction be necessary it should be offered with mildness.
4. With regard to others always hope for the best.
5. Always hate and avoid envy and malice.
6. The evening examination of conscience.
7. The morning offering of the heart to God.

1. CAST out all unworthy suspicions and rash judgements; learn to think well of all. We are but men; we may easily be mistaken. God alone knows the heart. Give not credit lightly or rashly to what is said in blame of others. It is better to think that the words may perhaps be false, than to believe them too readily. If the care of others is committed to thee, be watchful; and although thou mayest sometimes fear that some evil lies hid where no evil exists, yet thou must never let thy suspicion fix itself where thou art not certain. And if an unseasonable suspicion intrudes itself violently into thy mind, consent not to it,

but strive against it. He who readily thinks evil of others is truly miserable, and can seldom be at peace.

2. Those things which are not manifest offences against God, and of which thou art not sure, accustom thyself to interpret in the best sense. If anyone has sinned, sympathize with him, and with pity excuse him to thyself. Recall to mind how frail is the nature of man, and how prone to fall. Consider that it has come to pass through some slight negligence, or by the vehement impulse of temptation; and say within thyself, If I had been pressed by such circumstances, I should perhaps have fallen into more grevious and enormous sins. Turn the eyes of thy mind on thyself. Consider the sins of thy brother to be, as it were, a little mote, but thy own to be like a huge beam,* because of thy intolerable ingratitude towards God. With humility, beseech the Most High to forgive both thy own and thy brother's sins.

3. We do not say, however, that the sins of thy brethren are not to be reproved, and even punished, when justice and the honour of God require it, for to overlook vices unseasonably is not mercy, but cowardice; but it is the want of sincere affection that we condemn. He who has true brotherly love,

* *Cf.* Matt. vii 3; Luke vi 41.

pities indeed those who are in fault, and excuses them in his own mind: he loves them, and prefers them to himself; but yet he does not rashly allow their sins to go unpunished. What thou art unable to correct in others, commit to God, lamenting meanwhile before him.

4. Never despair of the salvation of any one; for those who are now the worst, may soon be changed by the grace of God and become most holy. Learn to bear the defects of others patiently, whether they be defects of mind or of body. We all have the same Father, we are all redeemed by the same Blood, we are all truly said to be one body. Esteem, therefore, both the evil and the good of thy neighbours to be thine own; grieve for the one and rejoice in the other; even if thy neighbours should be thy enemies.

5. Never let the pest of envy invade thy mind, with thy consent; for if thou enviest, thou lovest not; and if thou lovest not, thou art not of God.* When thou seest that others possess what thou hast not, when thou considerest that they have received more and higher gifts of grace than thou hast received, regard them not the less with sincere affection; but for this very reason love them more, and venerate in them the Holy Spirit. Rejoice and give thanks to God; for so will their merits

* *Cf.* 1 John iii 10.

become truly thine, and thou wilt be crowned with those of others as if they were thine own. If thou grievest, grieve not that they are good and perfect, but that thou art wicked and imperfect. Desire and strive to be as good and perfect as thou perceivest them to be.

6. Examine thy conscience frequently (keeping to a certain method), and reprove thyself. Do this chiefly at the end of thy daily actions, before thou givest thyself up to sleep. Think over seriously within thyself in what thou hast offended during that day; and, having asked pardon of God, resolve thenceforward more diligently to avoid sin. Commend thyself to the Lord Jesus Christ, and to his holy mother, and to thy guardian angel: and having made the sign of the cross, compose thyself modestly in bed; and thus calmly wait for sleep, with some pious thought in thy mind.

7. In the same way when thou risest, make the sign of the cross with attention, and humbly seek pardon of God for thy sins; and casting aside the confusion of useless dreams, meditate on something serious. Praise thy Creator, give thanks, and offer to him thy soul and thy body; and pray that he will deign to preserve thee during that day. Thus, yea, thus order thy life; thus hasten to the joys of eternal bliss.

CHAPTER XXXIII

IN ORDER TO ROOT OUT OUR DEFECTS WE MUST HAVE A FIRM AND COURAGEOUS WILL, AND CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

1. Let no man of good will ever despond no matter how weak he be.
2. Good will is a priceless treasure.
3. The fight against temptations should be manly, patient, and joyous.
4. The greater the fight the more glorious the crown.
5. Vicious impulses should be bravely checked.

1. THOU wilt say, perhaps: And what hope is there for me, who am liable to various passions, who cannot attain to perfection, who can hardly endure even the least austerity, or the lightest labour? If, indeed, thou canst not lead a sublime life, nor bear hardships, canst thou not be of good will, and love God and thy neighbour? What is easier or more sweet than to love? What, on the other hand, more hard and bitter than to hate? What is pleasanter, what easier, than to lead a good life? What, again, more joyless and laborious than to abandon God, and be a slave to vice? It is certainly true that we

may purchase heaven at less cost than hell, If thou lovest God, and hast good will, thou art of the number of the sons of God. And, if thou art a son, however little thou mayest be, thou wilt also be an heir. What then? Will God admit to his kingdom only those children who are great in his sight, and exclude those who are little? By no means: but all who are his, that is, all who pass hence bearing the mark of charity, although they may not be perfect in charity, will be saved, and at length obtain the joys of heaven.* For the Scripture saith: *To every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound*;† that is, to any one possessed of charity, possessed of merit, will a reward be given. It saith not, it will be given to him who has much, but not to him who has little; but it saith: *To every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound.* He will surely abound, for he will have as much as will satisfy him, indeed whatsoever he desires.

2. Good will is so great a treasure, that the whole world cannot be compared to it in value. For, when thou dost wish and desire to do any good work, but art not able, that holy desire is received by God as if it were the work itself. But, if thou canst work, and

* *Cf.* Rom. viii 14; Gal. iii 26.
† Luke xix 26.

workest not, then thou hast not the will to work. *Peace to men of good will.**

Be not, therefore, cast down because thou art as yet weak and imperfect; but humble thyself before God, and rejoice in the complete sanctity of those who are perfect. God may grant thee to make further progress. He sometimes bestows greater gifts than man even dares to ask.

3. Be not afraid; if he sees that it will contribute to thy salvation and to his honour, he will enable thee in time to disperse with the lightest breath that rust of vice, which, in the beginning of a better life, thou couldst hardly scrape off, so to speak, with an iron file. But, if it is his will that thou shouldst undergo a fierce combat before thou canst perfectly subdue thy vices and unruly passions; if, I say, he should permit these domestic enemies to molest thee even to the very end of thy life, be not dismayed: but, full of faith, bear patiently the weight of his hand, and joyfully embrace his will.

4. Although he who is naturally prone to sadness, indignation, anger, and similar passions, will find the strife harder than one whose mind is naturally joyful and serene; yet, if he strenuously resist these tumults, and endure them with forbearance for God's

* Luke ii 14.

sake, he will be effectually cleansed from sin, and prepare for himself a more glorious crown in heaven. For the allurements of the flesh and the assaults of vices, when we sedulously resist their attacks, diminish not our virtue, but adorn it, and increase our merit. It is easy for him to keep his mind unruffled who rarely endures internal tumults. It is easy for him to be cheerful who is seldom molested by interior darkness. It is easy for him to be sober who is rarely tempted by gluttony. It is easy for him to be pure whose mind is seldom afflicted by the stings of concupiscence and the obscene images of the night.

5. Endeavour to bind and repress those vicious passions and inclinations. Do all that is in thy power peacefully. Seek, ask, knock;* knowing that thy labours and thy desires are pleasing to thy all-merciful Creator. For he is often more pleased with the keenness of thy endeavours to attain virtue, than with the sweetness of the virtue itself. The deep and humble conviction of our own imperfection is more precious in his sight than the performance of miracles or any other great work.

* *Cf.* Matt. vii 7; Luke xi 9.

CHAPTER XXXIV

OF DESIRE OF THE TRUE JOYS OF HEAVEN

1. The happiness of the heavenly life.
2. This mortal life is a dreary winter.
3. Christ shall receive the soul with a joyous welcome.
4. The pleasures of earth are transitory: the joys of heaven eternal.

1. WOULD that love of God and contempt of the present life were so strong within thee that thou mightest truly say with the Apostle St Paul: *I desire to be dissolved, and to be with Christ!** There is nothing which more exhilarates the faithful and loving soul than the hope that, having fulfilled the appointed course of this life, it will attain to that blessed haven of eternal peace; where it will no more be stained with any sin; where no fear, no danger, no anxiety, no vicissitudes, will afflict it; where, full of charity, it will praise God without let or hindrance; where it will most perfectly please him, and will love nothing besides him; where, at length, it will entirely possess God, and be possessed by him. Since, in this present life, these

* Phil. i 23.

things cannot be fully and permanently enjoyed, death itself is desirable, or at least, tolerable to the just. For they feel how severe is the winter of this mortal life, and on that account they long for the summer of life eternal.

2. This life is, indeed, a gloomy winter, pinched by the frost of our own corruptions, clouded over by the darkness of ignorance, laid waste by the raging storms of so many calamities, labours, and sorrows. Those who sigh under the afflictions of the winter will be consoled and rejoice when the summer shall have come.

3. Happy is the hour, and most desirable the moment, when the heavenly Bridegroom joyfully meets the holy soul coming forth from the prison of the body with gentle words, and invites it, saying: *Arise, make haste, my love. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. Flowers have appeared in our land; the vines in flower yield their sweet smell, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.** Come forth with joy, most dear daughter: tremble not, nor be afraid; thou art brought out of exile, thou leavest the miseries of the calamitous world. For *nor mourning, nor crying, nor sorrow, shall be any more.*† Henceforth, the corruptible

* Cant. ii 10, 11, 12. † Apoc. xxi 4.

body shall not weigh down the soul: for when thou art admitted into the joy of thy Lord, thou shalt rejoice for ever in the gift of immortality.

4. But some sensual man reading this, who has been used to delight in visible things, or even in carnal pleasures, may perchance say to himself: And what joy can there be where feasts and banquets and all the pleasures of the flesh are absent? Alas, wretched man! the appetite for those carnal delights denotes, not health, but sickness. Thou art sick, thou art consumed by an evil thirst; and if thou couldst satisfy it, thou wouldst esteem thyself happy. But when with thy body thou shalt lay aside thy disease, then will be extinguished that fatal thirst, under which thou unhappily labourest. In the life to come, those who shall attain to God, shall enjoy true and solid delights. They who shall possess God will not need corruptible food and drink, for they will be full of God. God will be to them food and drink, and whatsoever they can desire; they will have all things in him, with whose vision they will be filled. They will ever see him, and ever be satisfied; and they will desire ever to see him, and ever to be satisfied. They will desire without anxiety, and they will have their fill without satiety.

CHAPTER XXXV

OF THE DELIGHTS OF OUR HEAVENLY COUNTRY

1. Eternal bliss dimly discerned in the beauties of nature.
2. The face-to-face vision of God and the fellowship with the angels.

1. O LIFE eternal! O longed-for country! O heavenly Jerusalem, who can describe thee? who can speak of thee, or rightly understand thee? In thee is that good, that joy, that solace, which *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man*;* for the sake of which so many legions of martyrs have most readily welcomed death. Thy gates shine with choice pearls; thy streets are paved with the purest gold; thy walls are bright with most precious stones. In thee, delicious gardens and pleasant vales are ever fresh; in thee, perennial flowers and violets continually bloom; in thee, the cinnamon and balsam incessantly breathe forth an ineffable odour of sweetness; in thee, all kinds of beautiful things abound without fading, remain without passing away,

* 1 Cor. ii 9.

exist without corruption, are eternal without change. In thee is a climate temperate and serene, beyond all human conception; in thee, are peace and repose surpassing all imagination; in thee is eternal day, and one life in all; in thee is certain security, and secure eternity, and eternal tranquillity, and tranquil happiness, and happy sweetness, and sweet joy; in thee shall the just shine as the sun.* No one can seek, or desire, or love anything, which he will not find in thee. That only which is nothing worth, is not in thee.

2. Oh, what an ocean of unalloyed bliss, what a torrent of unmixed joy, what an abyss of purest delight is it to see the God of gods in Sion,† to discern that incomprehensible glory of the most Holy Trinity: clearly to contemplate that surpassing fairness, perfectly to taste that unspeakable sweetness, from whence flows out all the beauty and sweetness of created things; to behold the most blessed Mother of God, to join the choirs of angels, to have perpetual fellowship with the holy Patriarchs and Prophets, with the holy Apostles and Martyrs, with the holy Confessors and Virgins: to know all the citizens of heaven, and to rejoice with each of them in their eternal happiness. Love this beati-

* *Cf.* Matt. xiii 43. † Ps. lxxxiii 8.

tude, and frequently sigh after it. Thou canst not, indeed, see it now with thy bodily eyes; but thou canst perceive it with the eyes of faith. Believe what thou seest not, that thou mayest deserve one day to obtain what thou hast believed.

CHAPTER XXXVI

OF PREPARATION FOR A HAPPY DEATH. THE PROFESSION OF ONE ABOUT TO DIE, AND HIS CONSOLATION

1. The vain fear of death should be corrected by thinking of God's kindness.
2. The seven steps of the preparation for death: (1) Watchful waiting; (2) Discarding of worldly cares; (3) Reception of Viaticum; (4) Meditation on the passion of Christ; (5) Recourse to our Lady and the Saints; (6) Patience and confidence inspired by Christ's death; (7) Contempt of the body.
3. The profession of faith at the hour of death.
4. The consolation of a happy death.

1. CEASE to love worldly things, and thy departure out of the world will not be grievous to thee. But perhaps thou art not greatly attached to anything in this world, thou possessest nothing that thou art not ready to forsake: yet art thou still a prey to fear, because thou knowest not how God will receive thee when thou passest hence, whether into the eternal rest of paradise, or into the temporary pains of purgatory. This knowledge is not necessary for thee; it is sufficient for thee to be certain that thou hast a most

pitiful Lord, who mercifully washes away sins, who has inspired thee with good will, who is both able and willing to save thee, if thou confidest humbly in him, and trustest not in thyself. Let not the consideration of his immeasurable goodness inspire thee with confidence and with the expectation of being saved.

2. Be ever watchful; as far as thou art able, let thy loins be girt, and thy lamp burning; that when the Lord cometh and knocketh, thou mayest open to him immediately.* But chiefly when the hour of death is evidently near, prepare thyself carefully for a happy departure. Dismiss from thy heart the cares and solicitudes of this world; receive the sacraments for thy viaticum with a grateful mind; and humbly commend thy soul to God. Reflect upon the passion of thy most pitiful Redeemer; embrace in spirit his blessed cross, kiss his crimson wounds, and hide thy whole self therein. Beseech Jesus, that he would deign to wash away all thy sins in his precious Blood. Commend thyself also to his most holy Mother, the Virgin Mary, and to the other citizens of heaven, especially those to whom thou hast had a more particular devotion. If thou dost call upon Mary from thy heart, if thou turnest to her with humility and confidence, she will certainly

* *Cf.* Luke xii 35, 36.

obtain for thee admittance into the kingdom which was perhaps closed against thee by thy iniquity and by the divine justice: for she is the Mother of mercy and the gate of paradise. Although the infirmity of nature may waver and tremble, though the horror of death may oppress thee, and though thou mayest be tortured to the utmost by the agonizing sharpness of thy pains, be thou ever patient, and persevere in holy hope and in holy confidence in God. Deny thyself in all things, and give thyself up to thy Lord, saying with Christ, Himself in fear and agony at the approach of death: *Father, thy will be done.** So shalt thou find rest and refreshment. Let it not seem hard to thee to die, since Christ himself suffered the death of the body. He went before, and, as it were, prepared the way, and made it smooth; be not thou reluctant to follow him; for his death will be the solace of thine. That corruptible body which thou art leaving is now but a vile garment. What is it to thee if it is corrupted, if it is reduced to dust and ashes, when thou hast laid it aside? Put off without fear thy garment, which thy God will one day restore to thee entire, bright, shining, and incorruptible.

3. In order that thou mayest pass without danger over the nets of the devil, and happily

* Matt. xxvi 42.

avoid the snares with which he is accustomed sometimes to afflict the dying; thou mayest, either mentally or in words, while thou art in possession of thy senses, declare thy forgiveness of all who have ever injured thee, and thy desire to end thy life in that faith in which an obedient child of thy holy Mother the Church ought to die; that thou believest all things which must be believed by the true and orthodox faithful of Christ; and that if, through the suggestions of the devil, or the violence of thy malady, thou shouldst perchance think, speak, or do anything contrary to this intention, thou dost by no means consent to such follies.

4. Having made this profession, thou wilt henceforth despise and ridicule all the promptings of impiety, which the devil in his malice may whisper; nay, thou wilt, if possible, cease to notice them. Trust in the Lord; rely upon him; cast utterly on him every thought, every fear, yea, thy whole self. For this is most pleasing to him, this he requires of thee above all things, and therefore he says in the Psalm: *Because he hoped in me, I will deliver him.** Thy most loving Father will neither mislead thee, nor reject thee; but will surely protect thee. And when thou art under his protection, there is no one who can hurt thee.

* Ps. xc 14.

CHAPTER XXXVII

CHRIST IS THE SURE HOPE OF OUR SALVATION

1. The merits of Christ are the source of our hope.
2. Good will is a poor thing in itself: in the merits of Christ it is abounding riches.
3. A thought to repress pride and banish anxiety.
4. Eleventh-hour conversions.

1. THOU must place thy chief hope of salvation not so much in the merits of the good works which thou mayest have done, as in the merits and mercies of Jesus Christ. If, however, the enemy should importunately urge thee either to distrust or to despair, thou mayest bring forward against him those things which the grace of God accomplished in thee; but above all, the passion of our Lord, and the death of our common Redeemer. Confess thyself to be sinful and miserable, whatever progress thou mayest seem to have made in perfection. For where thou perceivest in thyself no stain, or at most one only, God perhaps may see six hundred, or many more. Thou canst not of thyself obtain salvation; but with God all things are possible.

2. If thou art of good will, if thou dost earnestly desire to love God; thou art rich in this, although poor and naked in thyself.

For thou mayest assume to thyself those things which he did and suffered for thee. For thee made man, he came forth from the womb of the Virgin undefiled; for thee he laboured, for thee he fasted, for thee he watched and prayed; for thee he endured persecutions, injuries, insults, mockery, scourging, pains, and grief; for thee he shed his blood, and laid down his life; for thee he rose again, and ascended into heaven. Now, if thou comparest thy sins, yea, those of all the world, to these exceeding merits of thy God, of what account are they? For what is a grain of sand, compared with a mountain that fills all heaven and earth?

3. This is said, not that thou mayest be proud in thy confidence, but lest in thy humility thou shouldst be mistrustful.

Not they alone will come to God, who have long led a holy life, or practised great austerities; but all who manifest *a contrite and humble heart** are looked upon and received by him with clemency, however short may be the time of their leading a good life. How brief was the repentance of the thief hanging upon the cross, and how quickly did he obtain eternal life!†

4. But this being granted; it may not happen to all who repent at the last hour to

* Ps. l 19. † Luke xxiii 40, 43.

obtain that which he obtained (for all have not the same compunction that he had); yet it is a great thing, to have even begun here an amendment of life. For he will by no means perish who had begun during this pilgrimage to amend his life, but being cut off by death was not able to complete the amendment; for in him there remained the foundation of the love of God. And although he must undergo purgation before he can enter into the joys of eternal blessedness; yet will he not be destitute meanwhile of the consolation of a sure and certain hope.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

AGAINST DESPAIR AND ANXIETY IN THE HOUR OF DEATH

1. God will receive true repentance however brief and however tardy.
2. How to ward off despair.
3. Worry not about where, how, or when thou shalt die: take heed only how thou shalt live.

1. WHAT can be more generous than this promise of God? *The wickedness of the wicked,* he saith, *shall not hurt him, in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness.** He saith not, if he shall be converted two years, or two months, or two days before his death: but *in what day soever he shall turn from his wickedness,* in what day soever he shall lament over it, he shall be saved, provided that he truly and rightly laments.

2. If, therefore, thou murmurest and complainest in thy foolish thoughts, crying out that thy life has not been such as to allow thee the hope of attaining to eternal glory, do thou answer with holy humility and pious confidence: *I know whom I have believed.*† I know that the ineffable charity of God has adopted me as a son. God can do whatsoever he wills; and he wills to have mercy

* Ezech. xxxiii 12. † 2 Tim. i 12.

and to save; for this becomes his goodness and loving-kindness. Neither the multitude nor the enormity of my sins, nor the miseries of my daily frailties, can terrify me, while I call to mind his Incarnation, his Passion, and Death. He himself hath redeemed me, he hath shed his Blood for me, and by his death hath paid my debt. His mercy is immeasurably greater than can be my iniquity. His most holy wounds testify that I am reconciled, if I truly repent of my iniquities, if I truly desire to love him. He stretches forth his blessed arms on the cross, that he may receive and embrace me a sinner; I desire to live and to die in that embrace. I see in my God my own flesh; I trust that I shall one day become glorious where a part of me is already glorified. And although my iniquity would repel me from that fellowship of glory, yet the nature which I share will admit me to it. God is not so cruel as not to love the members of his body. His mercy is my only merit. So long as he ceaseth not to be merciful, I am not shorn of merit; and if his mercies are manifold, I am also rich in merits. Every pious worshipper of God and orthodox son of the Catholic Church, may at the hour of death in this manner strengthen himself against all suggestions of despair; be thou, therefore, of that number.

3. Moreover, whether thou shalt depart hence at home or abroad, whether in thy bed or in the fields, whether by a peaceful or a violent death, let not this greatly disturb or distress thee. It cannot be that he who leads a good life should die a bad death. By whatever kind of death he is overtaken, he will be in rest;* whether his life end by fire or water, by the sword or torments, by the attacks of wild beasts or the fury of the elements, by apoplexy or pestilence, whether suddenly or gradually, whether with many around him or alone.

Do thou, therefore, trust thyself wholly to the providence of God; leading a good life, and waiting joyfully for death. And, when it is at hand, go forth securely to thy most prodigal Father, eagerly desiring that he should make what use of thee he wills in eternity as well as in time. Go forth, I say, not as about to be cruelly cast by him into prison, but to be graciously received and cherished in the bosom of his mercy.

Read over this rule frequently, and carefully examine thy life by it; in order that thou mayest easily discover what is amiss in thee, and, having discovered it, mayest immediately set it right.

* *Cf.* Wisd. iv 7.

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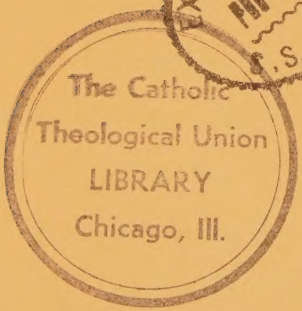

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